DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 069 PS 021 042

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TITLE They Never Viewed Themselves as Learners, They Just Came to School. Alaska Department of Education Funded Projects in Innovative Assessment 1991-92.
INSTITUTION Alaska State Dept. of Education, Juneau. Office of Data Management.
PUB DATE Oct 92
NOTE 115p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Assessment; Educational Change; Educational Finance; *Educational Innovation; Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; *Grants; Parent Participation; Program Descriptions; Program Implementation
IDENTIFIERS *Alaska

ABSTRACT

Compiled from interviews with people involved in various innovative assessment projects in Alaska, this report records the effects on assessment practices of grants from the Alaska Department of Education to school districts and individual teachers during the 1991-92 academic year. After a brief introduction, the report describes assessment projects for the cities and regions of Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Lower Yukon, Matanuska-Susitna, Northwest Arctic, Railbelt, and Southwest Region. Responses to the question, "What has been learned?" are reported in full, and the use of technology to support innovative assessment is discussed. Commonalities across projects are discussed and recommendations for future projects are offered. A series of appendixes, which comprises the bulk of the document, includes the interview questions, full texts of the interviews, a list of interviewees, overviews of innovative projects, and other materials. (MM)

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"They Never Viewed Themselves as Learners, They Just Came to School"

Alaska Department of Education
Funded Projects in Innovative Assessment
1991-92

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"They Never Viewed Themselves as Learners, They Just Came to School"

Alaska Department of Education
Funded Projects in Innovative Assessment
1991-92

Prepared for the Alaska Department of Education
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October 1992

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Introduction

The Alaska Department of Education continued a highly successful effort to encourage innovative assessment through small "seed money" grants to school districts and individual teachers during the 1991-92 academic year. For the past three years districts have been offered seed money to begin investigating and implementing innovative models of student assessment. During the first two years districts used their funds to bring small planning groups together to work out details; districts were again given a small amount of funding to carry their projects into the implementation phase.

In addition, individual teachers had the opportunity to apply for innovative assessment grants in the areas of science and math. Districts receiving funds during the 1991-92 academic year included Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Kenai, Ketchikan, Kodiak, Lower Yukon, Matanuska-Susitna, Northwest Arctic, Railbelt and Southwest Region. The effort also included funding a project with the University of Alaska-Anchorage using technology as an assemment tool.

There were no constraints on districts or individual teachers to follow a particular model. However, the Department did disseminate some information, provide training opportunities and encourage projects to communicate with one another. Individual districts and schools conducted inservices and in some instances arranged for credit courses. In some instances teachers from the ongoing projects were invited to other districts to assist in the beginning stages of development.

The following report is a compilation of interviews with people from the various innovative assessment projects. The purposes of the interview process were to record the effects of the seed money, to provide an overview and comparison of the various projects, to "celebrate" the work done by each district, and to disseminate information on the projects. One or two persons from each project were selected for interview. Interview questions and the full text of interviews is included in the Appendices to this report.

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Project Descriptions

Responses to the several questions (See Appendix A) about the individual projects, why they were conceived, the content upon which they focus, the student reactions to the projects, and the standards used in assessment have been summarized in the following project descriptions.

Anchorage School District
Susitna Elementary School

> *Pragmatically, it's difficult to do authentic assessment. Science is a process, mathematics thinking is a process. This all fits into authentic assessment so nicely: it's the way we look at elementary Science. We're trying to move it away from the knowledge and into the process. We're also exploring [process skills in] art. Our portfolio is constantly heading toward how the process is going and how kids are demonstrating [what they know]."*
>
> *Sonja Hawkins*

Susitna Elementary continued its "showcase" work in portfolio development and student-led parent conferences. (The first year's efforts of this and other projects are recorded in *At First They Thought it Was an Animal We Were Going to Feed, an Overview of Portfolio Assessment Projects in Alaska*, published in May of 1991 and available through the Alaska Department of Education.)

Though the school-wide effort this year was to incorporate Mathematics assessment into the portfolio, Principal Sonja Hawkins supported Teacher Dave Gillam in gathering information and data on what was being done in Science, and his development of alternatives for Science performance assessment. Gillam began working on a rubric for second grade Science, but development is proceeding slowly. Hawkins is committed to the personal support necessary to keeping "this from becoming another checklist," as she is committed to the process approach to Science. Currently, Gillam is in the "process of modification" of what he had done last year. The central difficulty he is confronting is the complexity of "how to quantify what the exploration is that kids are doing...how that fits into the process skills [and] how to come up with an assessment of a process skill that doesn't also involve all of the other skills." Gillam is attempting to generate generic, standardized criteria for judging student responses.

Susitna's "whole school" effort this year focuses on Math. The process for developing the Math rubric was, according to Hawkins, complicated by the "Report Card" initiative, and the district's strategic planning effort. She perceived that it was important to tie all of the initiatives together. "I'm trying to keep it focused so that they can overlap. I didn't want to look at the Math this way, but I'm trying to tie it all in. [So] we looked at computation skills because these are low." A strength of the Susitna program continues to be the commitment of its Portfolio Steering Committee, which is looking at Mathematics this year.

Anchorage School District
District-Level Project

> *More and more of the teachers are moving toward student-led parent conferences. Those who have moved in that direction are very pleased.*
> *Tom Straugh*

Funds provided by the Alaska DOE facilitated the expansion of the successful Susitna Elementary portfolio process to other elementary Anchorage Elementary schools--Fairview, Homestead, Ravenwood and Eagle River. Susitna teachers developed and delivered a course in 1991, and this course was used to acquaint teachers from interested elementaries.

The use of portfolios in the other elementaries is voluntary, but at three schools, the portfolio process has become part of Report Card goals. According to Assessment and Evaluation Specialist Tom Straugh, "Fairview actually began the process and had the most schoolwide success." In the other schools, teachers were able to develop "functional portfolios" and begin their use this year. Development "concentrated primarily in the area of writing," which, according to Straugh, is the "easiest place for an elementary teacher to start." Student-led parent conferences are used by an increasing number of teachers who have taken the course.

Work is in progress on extracting data from the portfolio for use in district growth comparisons. This effort, according to Straugh, requires evaluation to be part of the development process. "You need to be proactive in development of rubrics with staff if you want to gather any consistent data. If they have a rubric training, they use it, and the child learns about the rubric--it's a powerful way to teach writing. As teachers do more teaching writing with a rubric, it makes it more possible to record scores with the rubric in mind. If they haven't done scoring with a rubric, they can still sit together and pull out data across several pieces and get a single score. Reliability of the scoring is higher with a rubric."

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Badger Road Elementary

> *Last week I did the magnet activity, and kids got so interested they ignored the assessing. On the other hand, the class I teach at the U for teachers in training...[had]...very great difficulty. They want to be able to ask and get an answer, and we don't teach like that. And they have a real hard time coming around and getting back into hands on, which is what they have to do in getting back into the classroom. And the elementary kids don't have trouble at all.*
> Leslie Gordon

Fairbanks teacher Leslie Gordon, at the Badger Road Science Magnet School, has been working to develop tubs containing all of the equipment, supplies and instructions to test the district's science process skill at each elementary grade. The project began when Gordon noticed that though process skills were identified in the district curriculum, there were no "process skill tests." Pre- and post-tests were developed for each elementary grade level, and the "hands-on"

tests were then developed and housed in the big tubs. Tubs include a teacher's manual, and instructions for older children and parent volunteers working with the younger children. Kits include "everything needed to teach each skill."

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Birch Elementary

> *We discovered that [while] people in the district were saying that we were doing a neat job...we still were tied into the ITBS...I felt we needed to establish ourselves in the area of portfolio assessment and say we can get an similar kind of data using the portfolio. We need benchmark data in order to do this. [Without it] we would be ignored, would still have to go through what is not age-appropriate testing for these kids.*
>
> *Chris Williams*

At Birch Elementary School, primary-level portfolios begun two years ago reflect developmental stages in Language Arts (most prominently reading, writing and spelling, with one assessment of speaking in midyear) and mathematics, and include a social/emotional checklist. The portfolios were used for parent conferencing, and Birch teachers spent the first conference in October training parents to understand the portfolio system. Students were involved in selecting the writing pieces which are included in the portfolio. (Teacher reactions were reported in the 1991 version of this report.)

Chris Williams, principal at Birch during the development process, is now at Ladd Elementary. She cites important work which Birch was beginning, in using their original portfolio with control groups and using a teacher-modified design with other groups. The original portfolio, described in the 1991 report, was reported by this process to seem "fairly awkward." Though the behavior checklist was useful, staff wanted to assess more than "just language," and could not find commercial models which were pertinent to what they were doing and needed. Staff worked on modification of the models, especially in Kindergarten attention and listening skills, and in adding in some Mathematics assessment. Development was progressing toward a whole child assessment, and some pre- and post-tests which could be standardized for "accountability purposes."

A strong recommendation from Williams is that the portfolio system be tied somehow to the district assessment model, so that student achievement thus reported will receive attention and recognition. To accomplish this, Williams feels it is important for schools to establish benchmark data. This was to have been the next step at Birch.

Parents at Birch continue to be most supportive of the portfolio system and its use in parent conferences. When funds were cut for the project, parents contributed $1000 to keep it going.

Juneau Douglas School District
Mathematics Pilot Project

Most of our assessment has to do with computation. All of the AMC standards are saying to de-emphasize that. We need to find out about how children are thinking, problem solving, etc. I don't think you can do that by a paper-pencil test. Also, I think it doesn't allow you to evaluate what children can do in cooperative groups, and that's an important part of Math training.

Lynn Williams

In addition to the districtwide initiative to assess language arts through a portfolio, work has begun to look at mathematics assessment, spearheaded by Lynn Williams, Mathematics Teacher Trainer. Karen Higgins of the University of Oregon will be coming to work with teachers on innovative mathematics assessment for grades 3-8. Williams feels it is important to look at the intermediate grades because "most of the resources we've seen published are K-2." Higgins will actually begin this year teaching a credit class and working with a teacher researcher group. Funds from the DOE were used to buy assessment books for teacher resource. Hopefully, such a course will encourage teachers to conduct classroom research about innovative assessment.

The district has been involved for the past two years in portfolio assessment in Language Arts, and has committed to moving the portfolio system up one grade each year. According to Williams, "Standards are moving up through the elementary for writing and reading, but a lot of people are interested in doing something besides paper and pencil testing." She selected Higgins to help teachers get started because "[she] doesn't encourage people to go full-blown alternative assessment at once." The strategy is, "take a piece and work on that piece," which Williams believes is "not so overwhelming. There are very few people who can jump into portfolio assessment right off the bat."

Juneau Douglas School District
District-wide Effort

For us, we're doing everybody in the district; this is not a voluntary option. So we have to be constantly going back in meetings with teachers, representing the goal, representing that parents think this is a good idea...the inner dynamics of all of that requires lots of vigilant tending to the process and how the process gets put in place.

Annie Calkins

A mandated portfolio assessment for all teachers requires tremendous district effort, according to Curriculum Director Annie Calkins. The School Board, two years ago, made a commitment to the process, and to adding one grade per year. The project this year is beginning planning with the third grade teachers. Teams of third grade teachers are already identifying where they wish to begin.

The district has just published a second edition of their widely-circulated portfolio handbook. Project teachers have received not only the promised personal computer support, but teams of five teachers have also received a scanner to assist them in placing student work on

computer discs for storage. Teachers are using the computers for entering narratives, reading attitude surveys, and during writing conferences. Teachers are reported to be "highly enthusiastic" about how computers are helping them. Calkins credits computer technology with helping to convince teachers that technology can assist them, not just with inputting information, but with storage. "People are saying, 'look at this--we'll need a moving van'; and I'm saying, 'look at this disc,'" she stated.

Teachers have received a demonstration of computerized portfolio systems such as the Grady Profile, and they are considered a possible goal for the future, when teachers have more experience with computers. Pilots are going on at fourth, fifth and sixth grades, where teachers perceive that "students are older and can do more of their own work on the computer." At these intermediate grades, more use of the computer for portfolio documentation is taking place.

Another area of challenge is the transition in Kindergarten between oral and written language, and the development of benchmarks and standards. Compatibility of teacher generated standards and the Alaska 2000 initiative is also a question. Calkins stated, "We continue to communicate with people across the country and are trying to influence the Chapter I legislation, and how we can put in place a system of alternative assessment that is not NCE based."

Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
District-wide Effort

> *It's become apparent to the teachers that assessment will drive instruction, but in a more powerful positive way because they'll be getting quality feedback on analysis, evaluation, comparison and synthesis, as opposed to recall. They also realize that they're doing a lot more with authentic assessment than they thought...and...the last thing that we're discovering is that there are really three levels where assessment can take place, all related, [and] all can be authentic. The first is in the classroom. Then if we benchmark, we can have building assessments. Teachers can design assessments that are meaningful and powerful at building level, that are not reported beyond that. Though they could be, to the building's 'public.' And the third level is district assessment that can be reported to the public.*
>
> *Paul Epperson*

A group of Kenai teachers, facilitated by Paul Epperson, Director of Secondary Education, have been meeting to design a district-wide mathematics assessment which can be used at benchmark grades (3, 6, 8 and Transition Math/Algebra) and reported as the current Writing Assessment is reported, to staff and the public. Funds from the DOE grant and the district were used partially to provide inservice for K-12 staff representatives. Karen Higgins, mentioned by other districts, "got us off to a wonderful start," and now release time and donated teacher time has been utilized to make what Epperson describes as substantial progress toward the goal of having a pilot ready to begin testing after Christmas.

The team of teachers working with Epperson to develop two to four questions per grade, with a rubric for scoring, for pilot benchmark testing includes elementary representatives Mary

Beaumont, Robert Dover, Bud Draper, Nancy Tipton, Janet Walker, Nancy Vait, Marcia Gusty, Gail Knobf and Carole Deemers; and secondary representatives John Christensen, Erling Hofseth, Jean Huff, Sandra Miller, Linda Ralston, Mary Sanders, Scott Richmond, John Davis, Peter Thielke, and Ed Marmon.

Much has been learned in the process, according to Epperson. "We had a problem in the beginning [in that] our mindset...was not 'authentic'...We were doing recall (except for an outstanding analytical writing assessment)...We had to figure out what is authentic, develop outcomes for our Math and then actually write our assessment tool. Areas under consideration for the district assessment are problem solving skills and strategies, procedural knowledge, conceptual understanding, and communication. The teacher team is exploring performance testing, narration, and cooperative group work as possible assessment formats.

Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District
Individual Teacher Project

> *It was more of a self-reflective, self-assessment type of thing for the kids. It was very interesting because they had never viewed themselves as learners--they just came to school. So when we asked them, how do you feel about yourselves as learners, they said, 'huh?' We had kids who got F's, but even though they had an F, they said, 'yes, I had an F and this is why and here is my strategy for bringing this grade up.' In the past the parent said, 'why did you have an F?' and they said, ' don't know; she doesn't like me.'*
>
> *Anne Germain*

Intermediate grade teachers Anne Germain and Earlene Brown wanted to investigate the way children think mathematically at the fifth and sixth grade levels, and develop appropriate assessment strategies. They conducted Piaget Conservation tests and found that "some of the things we were asking [fifth and sixth grade students] to do were inappropriate....We wanted some time to research and read what was current in Math assessment, and develop some models and try them out with kids." Germain and Brown hoped to find that there was an appropriate method for assessing Mathematics problem solving at the upper elementary level, and to present this method to their peers at one of the state's instructional improvement academies.

Deploring the lack of assessment resources for upper elementary students, these teachers utilized resources such as the Piaget Conservation Test, Terry Austin (Fairbanks), materials from The Math Solution, and the support of the Alaska Teacher Research Network. They are interested in enabling children to transfer problem solving strategies taught in Math to other areas. They are also doing Math centers, where students are provided with a menu of challenge activities. But they have come to believe that there is no "best model" for upper elementary Mathematics assessment. Instead they now believe that assessment is so inextricably linked to instruction that methods must vary with instructional methodology. They presented their findings at the Southeast Instructional Improvement Academy in June.

Following the lead of Terry Austin, Germain and Brown began student-led parent conferences. Students kept their own gradebooks and score graphs in all subjects, and figured their own grades, based upon scores and a student assessment of responsibility and effort.

Students wrote about their grade, and how it made them feel. They chose portfolio contents to back up their grade, and presented these to their parents. Students were provided with modeling and training on how to conduct the conference. According to Germain, "It became one of the most successful things I've ever done in 12 years of teaching. Students had their parent's undivided attention. The conferences took 45 minutes. The kids were really excited; they practically floated out of the room. Evaluation from the parents was wonderful. To see their child in a different light, to communicate. We had 100% parent attendance."

Kodiak Borough School District
District Awareness Project

> *I have a real concern of portfolios being mandated in any school district.*
> *Robbie Ward*

Kodiak is providing information to teachers in K-1 assessment practices, and provide Kindergarten and first grade teachers the opportunity to confer and reflect about the information. Questions about whether to become involved will then become part of the site-based decision making process. Information has come in the form of "educating teachers in what other districts are doing, taking teachers to other districts [i.e. to the primary restructuring workshop in Mat-Su], and also bringing people to our district (i.e. Annie Calkins from Juneau and Mary Carolyn Ramsaur from Fairbanks) to provide some awareness of what other districts are doing," stated Robbie Ward, Director of Federal Programs. At this point, Kodiak is "strictly working with K-1 teachers, and inviting second grade teachers to meetings for information only."

Lower Yukon School District
District-wide Effort

> *I think what we're going to end up with is more than one type of portfolio: a showcase type and a growth portfolio. One is in process all of the time, so to speak. We may end up with a teacher-directed, all scored, and ITBS pencil-paper test kind of thing; and I'm hoping that at the end of the year we'll merge those.*
> *Donna Sherrouse*

The Lower Yukon School District is currently using the portfolio to assess all K-1 subject areas. The portfolio has replaced the report card at these levels. This last year, the district continued to provide training for teachers in an effort to extend the existing project to looking at authentic assessment strategies for Math and Science in other grade levels.

This year, the district is rewriting its Mathematics curriculum and "authentic assessment will be part of the revision. A trainer from Juneau provided a two-day training workshop, and information was disseminated K-12 throughout the district...As part of this effort, teachers who came included an assessment task force for the district, representatives from the K-1 portfolio group, as well as Math and Science teachers," stated Donna Sherrouse, Director of Curriculum. The workshop looked at a variety of techniques: "critical thinking, observed behaviors, Science and Math journals, etc."

K-1 teachers are meeting again to develop a narrative with a rubric for the portfolio so there is "transitioning between grades." Sherrouse said, Standards for the performance in Language Arts for the K-1 portfolio are correlated with the district's reading series, and Sherrouse expects to have that in the Math curriculum as well.

The portfolio decision was made prior to Sherrouse's coming to LYSD, but she believes the project began as a result of encouragement from the Alaska DOE, which provided a workshop. It is a process she feels meets a district's need to communicate what students are doing better than the traditional grading system. K-1 teachers met several times last year with consultant Bill Buell, and Sherrouse credits him with helping teachers to expand how they were looking at what went into a portfolio. "One thing that's been very interesting...by the end of the year, kids were saying they wanted to write a journal [and were] actively involved in picking out their portfolio items for the end of the year. I think Bill Buell is a big player in that scene, because when he started teachers were hooked on checklists, and by the end of the year they were taking pictures, and *et cetera*. It really turned it around and made it real positive for us."

Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
Cottonwood Creek Elementary

> *Kids sort of thought it was fun. I'm not sure they were looking at it really as assessment. [We approached it as,] 'Okay kids, we've had a lot of fun doing this Science unit, now let's see what you remember.' They thought it was fun.*
>
> *Chester Anderson*

At Cottonwood Creek Elementary, parents and teachers have been piloting the performance tests which accompany Britannica's Full Option Science Program. Principal Chester Anderson went to national Science conferences to search for a Science program which teachers liked and which was "hands on" and "performance based." The FOSS program was selected not only because it met these criteria, but because it was developmentally appropriate, utilized cooperative learning strategies and included performance testing instructions.

Funds from the DOE were used to develop performance testing kits which contained enough materials for several tables of students to be testing simultaneously, and to contract with parents to conduct the tests at the end of the unit. A California teacher experienced in the system came and provided training for teachers. The principal's strong support is also needed, according to Anderson.

Even when performance testing is thus supported, however, Anderson cautions that "it will not happen overnight...it's still going to take two to three years for teachers to let kids go through the performance testing." This begins the fourth year the school has used some part of the FOSS program, and teachers will be piloting and evaluating the units at all grades.

In addition to making sure that the performance tests are used, Anderson is concerned about continuing to integrate performance tests into the OBE approach. "What we are wanting to do is put together parent handbooks of what we're trying teach and what kids are expected to learn at each grade level...we want to build this in somehow... that's where it's going to end up someday."

At the last districtwide inservice, Cottonwood Creek's teachers conducted two sessions to demonstrate the kits to their peers from other schools.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
Teacher Interdisciplinary Team Project

> *We do not have any kind of parent-teacher or student-parent communication...built into our system at all. We have the traditional parent-teacher conferences. So what we wanted to do, because this is traditionally the age that ends up falling through the cracks...[was create]...a time where [this could take place]. We really felt there was something missing as far as students being able to communicate with the parents. The portfolios forced them to reflect on their work and what they had really learned, think about anything that they might have learned.*
>
> *Mardene Collins*

At Colony Middle School, the seventh grade interdisciplinary team--Mardene Collins, Linda Volkman, Cathy Walter and Ray DePriest--developed a portfolio to be used in student-led parent conferences. Funding for release time for development and the conferences themselves was provided partially by the DOE (Math and Science) and partly through principal John Norman's discretionary funds (Language Arts and Social Studies). "We were trying to use the portfolio as a presentation of self," said Mardene Collins. "A presentation of self needs an audience, so we initiated a program of student-led parent conferences" with teachers acting only as facilitators. Parents who wished to conference with the teacher were asked to come back at another time. Increasing student self-esteem was a major focus of the portfolio.

The four teachers initiated portfolios of "different natures and makeups. Students chose their favorite pieces of work, or what they were interested in from each of the four subject areas." According to Collins, "We also included an essay on work habits and study skills, and whether they had met goals for each of the four core areas. " Post-conference evaluations for students and parents indicated positive reactions to the process.

The teachers' observation was that "It did affect self-esteem. Students took it to heart. Teachers had a conference folder for each of them, and wrote a note of encouragement in the front for each ('this is new for all of us; if you need help, we will be there to help')." Student demeanor and post-conference evaluations showed teachers that students were positively affected. Collins observed, "It was the first time some had been able to sit down with a parent without any interruptions. They said things like 'I don't have enough time to study, a place to study, we're always gone.' Some parents said, though, 'my student and I communicate anyway.' But they still really liked the idea that their child would be doing this."

Northwest Arctic School District
Individual Teacher Project

In assessment you have to look at how you can count what you're having kids do as ways to get to a concept you've presented. A lot of it becomes a justification game. People are hesitant to use a drawing, say, as an assessment device--but nobody questions a test. It shouldn't be any different. You just have to think, 'how is this related to the concept I'm trying to teach.'

Karl Kowalski

In his position last year as fourth grade teacher, Karl Kowalski used DOE funds to purchase hands on Science equipment and portfolio materials for students to use in recording their Science knowledge in a variety of ways. His students built "portfolio boxes," or "treasure chests," in which to store "everything important in Science to them. Some things were required, and some they got to choose. I required one copy of a video, and some drawing. I knew how they performed on written tests--the last thing they needed was more of that. We kept drawings, sketches, a log book [daily journal]; we drew pictures. For some special education kids, it was mainly drawing."

Trained as a biologist as well as a teacher, Kowalski felt he was "always at a loss to see how kids were learning. He especially wanted to look at process skills Kowalski wanted to look at process skills, and generated the method himself. Experimenting with any methodology which would help him to understand the children's' thought processes, he developed checklists for watching videos and assessing daily logs which looked at vocabulary and conceptual knowledge. He looked at journals, wrote comments, and put a personal evaluation in their portfolio box. Comments were their private comments. He developed a rubric and incorporated this into the student's grade.

Students appeared not to connect the "treasure chest" with assessment. "I told them, but I don't think it hit them. I ordered some of those fold-together cardboard boxes, pencil, paper, pens--I think they got lost in the let's have fun doing it rather than [we're being tested]. I felt like it was very positive. It turned out to be a lot more work for me than a pencil and paper test is, but I think I learned more about what the kids are learning in Science than if I had given them a pencil and paper test."

Railbelt School District
District-wide Effort

The parent involvement is a real exciting part of it for me. Last year when I had parent conferences I could bring their writing portfolio out, and just having those there...the parents were just thrilled to see that side of their child. It's exciting for them. I think that's an aspect to this that we're going to be seeing more of. I know as a parent myself, what would I like to be able to see [actual work].

Karen Harris

We just met and talked about this: innovative assessment seems like such heavy duty terminology for what we feel like we've done. We see this meeting a real classroom-based need, but we're not sure about its application beyond that...We're still wrestling with the idea of how this fits assessment, per se. Teachers have a clearer picture after working with a pilot for a year of how it meets their classroom needs for assessment, but we haven't tried to extend it any further than that.

Kathleen Formella

Railbelt's five secondary language arts teachers piloted a student writing portfolio second semester of last year, working with the components of writing that are looked at with the district writing assessment. Portfolios included a comparison contrast essay, poetry, an illustrated cover, a table of contents and a rough-draft-to-publication piece to show the writing process. The letter of introduction was designed as a reflective piece. Though students had some required pieces, one of each "mode," most pieces were student selected.

The project was initiated as part of a general effort to improve the secondary program, and other content teachers will hopefully be brought into the process this year. Standards for the portfolio are, at this point, those of individual teachers, some of whom did not grade it at all. The sharing and "publication" aspect of the portfolio pilot seems to have been the most successful piece. Not only did teachers read students' work, but other students read and made responses, and then the five teachers and Formella spent a day reading all of the portfolios and writing comments to the students. Teacher Karen Harris really enjoyed being able to read the work of students from other schools, and responding to them. She stated, "I like...finding out more about how important it is to kids to have their material read and shared... I responded to writing from kids in another school who didn't have me for a teacher...It was wonderful, they were very excited. They wanted to see if other people had read their piece."

Beginning the process second semester appears to have made students and teachers feel rushed. During the evaluation of the process, students requested more time. "This year they're ready for it," according to Harris, "asking about it, thinking about pieces to save. It's amazing how far that one semester has taken us, really. Student reactions are positive. The reactions of other teachers was extremely positive, also. Students who weren't seen as having a lot of talent or expertise put together a lot of neat stuff." Portfolio contents will be limited to 10 pieces this year.

Southwest Region School District
District-wide Effort

We wanted to try to demonstrate that we were reaching some successes, having students achieve mastery of certain items and concepts, because standardized tests weren't showing that. This was a vehicle whereby we could show growth.

Janelle Cowan

Southwest Region is deeply into implementation of their criterion-referenced testing. Results become part of a student portfolio system. This past year, central office support personnel and a group of teachers worked on adding performance-based questions to the CRT system. In the district's terminology, "alpha" questions are multiple choice, and "beta" questions are performance based. For beta questions, students must choose a way to demonstrate that they know the concept. Janelle Cowan, Curriculum Director, says, "We're looking for a demonstration that they are able to do a task...rather than filling in the blank."

The dual assessment began in Language Arts (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening) and Math (computation, numeration, measurement, geometry and problem solving). According to Cowan, "We're trying now to come up with a district profile of the number of students who master a competency at a grade level districtwide."

Mastery will be designated for those students who can show 80% competency with three of four trials. Alpha questions will be tested three times during the year, and beta questions at least once at the teacher's discretion. The test results are then inserted into each student's portfolio, and the instructional program is customized for students based upon the competencies they need. The major criticism of last year's pilot was that it was too time-consuming for teachers, and the district is attempting to computerize the process as much as possible. Todd Overby, Education Specialist for the district, is in charge of the development of the computer management part of the program.

Overby is enthusiastic about the work done so far. He is using a Microsoft Works database with the Diamond Peak instructional management system. He stated, "It works fine for what we want to do. Basically it was written in data-base form, a test item bank that we can put questions in and reference them to a particular objective. Then we develop questions or activities for that one that would be used to test the skill...We can put test questions into the bank, or we can use the ones that came with the bank. Teachers prefer their own questions. Then it's a test generator. We can tell it the parameters of the test, and it will construct the test. It will also grade an alpha level test using a scantron form. The information, objective by objective, goes into the student's record. We have a student management record keeping data base also."

What Has Been Learned?

Teacher and administrator responses to the question "What Has Been Learned?" have not been summarized. They represent the diversity of the projects and the individuals involved, and are, therefore, reported in full:

- Utilizing the knowledge of the teachers puts the teachers in truly a professional [mode]. You really have to listen; we're training ourselves to listen to kids and observe kids. For me, as an administrator, it was actually listening to the staff and observing teachers. *Sonja Hawkins*

- I was playing around with authentic assessment last year, and what I found was that while the task was authentic, the assessment wasn't. I think the most important thing is that with authentic assessment, whatever you're going to do with the kids has to relate in some way to whatever they use in their particular school. In Anchorage, they need to be tied to the kits that the kids do, so the assessment isn't unrelated to what they're doing. If we study

birds, and you're trying to assess if they can make generalizations, it has to have something to do with birds. Start with the most important two or three process skills and really focus in on those, and don't try to do ten or twelve, which is what I started out doing. Don't try to do it all. *Dave Gillam*

- This is a project that's worth doing slowly. It's a project that's so important that people need to start slowly and not get burned out. Start with one area and learn it well, working with it. Don't try to do eight areas with parent conferences in all eight areas by the end of the first nine weeks. *Tom Straugh*

- Since we just did the pretest this year, it would be just a sort of forecast, but I think mostly having this [process skills assessment kit] in [teachers'] hands and having them know these are the identified skills means the focus is going to change in those classrooms. Teacher accountability and interest is what's going to change. *Leslie Gordon*

- Basically, I think when we take the time to help parents understand how children are assessed, and we can produce results that are visible, that parents can sit down and see, we find that we have parents who are really supporting our system. We have parents who understand the developmental process of kids, when we take the time to train them. Not only did we present portfolio [contents], but [during] our initial, October meeting, the majority of time was spent teaching and training parents. And then, initially, before they saw their child's portfolio we developed a little pamphlet about portfolios...It was a small school, and they didn't have much, but parents were willing to donate to keep the program going. And they were out talking about it; parents are our strongest support. *Chris Williams*

- I'm using Math learning logs, and have children [keep] a problem solving notebook to write their strategies for problem solving. So I do some assessment on that. I'm really pleased. What is really exciting is to see children expand their ways of thinking and expand their approaches. For instance, I was working with children to count twelve things, and one child said, "I know there are 12 because I counted them." Another child said, "I counted them by 2's," and then the children began to offer other strategies. After they had shared these, you could see them using the various strategies in the next problem. Once children become aware of different ways, they'll use them. *Lynn Williams*.

- The first grade people...it's so interesting...this is their third year of doing districtwide. I had a long chat with a couple of them who, two years ago, were outspoken against the project, hostile in public meetings. I wanted to talk with them now about the stuff that they've learned, and it has revolutionized the way they think about instruction and assessment." These teachers offered to talk to the upper grade teachers who are reluctant to participate, to share their positive feelings. "That part has been real encouraging, but it truly is a huge shift for teachers. I did a couple of workshops outside of Seattle. Their list of concerns and questions [showed a] whole lot of fear of doing anything different. *Annie Calkins*.

- It is the student-led conferences. *Anne Germain*

- The variety of what teachers are doing is really quite widespread, on an individual basis. *Robbie Ward*

- I think it's just a much more positive way to communicate with parents about how children are doing in school. It's very visual and for our population that's really important. It appears to me that it's a much more positive thing...we're allowing the children to participate in the conferences, and my perception is that it's a whole lot less negative and more pleasant for us to have a parent conference in our district today than it might have been four years ago. And I've also found teachers saying, 'I'd forgotten how much children had grown until I looked back at the portfolio and I said, wow, look at what I've done.' *Donna Sherrouse*

- I really believe in it; we need to be doing more performance assessment. Feasibility: it's tough for teachers to get into this--an administrator really needs to get behind it. You may have it happen just in pockets. The assessment is there as part of the unit, and they expect the teacher to do it, but in my experience, elementary teachers are trying to teach Math, teach reading, holistic writing...We've always talked about hands-on Science, but to be quite honest, I haven't really seen that happening because of the time commitment. I went into every teacher's room, and every time I saw it happening. The last step is performance assessment. Teachers will use class activities ['okay, the kid did it') or fall back on older type regurgitation of facts. [These are] easier to do. I don't have any evidence of that, just a feeling. Maybe the performance testing would happen anyway. But I don't think so, because it's the end of the unit, you have to collect all of these things, set up the tables, etc. *Chester Anderson*

- Well, I think overall that this was such a positive experience. Some of the things we used, the planning that went into it, the mechanics of it...It took a lot for us to get it off the ground. We will definitely do it again. We won't have administrative leave time built in [for] planning time, the day for conferences, refreshments. We had subs in the regular classroom then. We'll probably end up having to do them maybe a couple of evenings this year. I think it's the whole idea of expanding the network of who's involved in school and who we communicate with. We need to have other audiences for student work and make it not only meaningful to them, but important to share with others. *Mardene Collins*

- Even though it does take more time, we have to remember that we have to meet the needs of individual kids in our classroom...We have to give them different opportunities to show us back what they've learned. If I were teaching this year I think I'd be spending more of my time trying to find...creative ways to assess, rather than trying to learn new ways to teach. The most important aspect...turned out to be the videotape. I noticed that in walking around the room I don't pick up nearly as much as when I can examine the tape at home. Lo and behold that quiet kid was actually paying attention and doing the processing in her head, and would say to the rest of the team that looked frantically busy, 'why don't you try this.' That's something I might have missed. *Karl Kowalski*

- One step at a time, I guess. When we started on this, trying to define all of the modes we wanted, still keeping student choice, or starting in every subject area, or some big project, that was kind of overwhelming. When we whittled it down, and made a specific focus, that worked well. Now we're ready to branch out. *Kathy Formella*

- The joy and excitement that the kids had. The enthusiasm they felt for being able to read each other's work--to take the time to enjoy and share their work. A lot of other things came out of it, too. The concern with mechanics and grammar came out because they wanted to take pride in what was in their portfolio. It's important for them to be mechanically correct now. I didn't have to beat them with a stick; it came from them. I also had kids that weren't successful in school, at risk, resource kids, who did beautiful portfolios. They could really showcase their skills. The kids who usually get good feelings were getting good feelings, but the others were too, and that was unusual. *Karen Harris*

- Read the research, and try to anticipate the numerous questions about the program. Be able to back up why you're doing what you're doing because of sound research. That's helped guide us in the program. And making sure we're doing what we're doing based upon past experience. We have steered away from some of the most controversial items--throwing out report cards, removing grade level designations--we want that to happen on its own. *Janelle Cowan*

- If I had to narrow it down to one, [it would be,] don't try to go to outcome-based or competency based in one year. Give yourself at least five [years] to implement it and another five to refine it. Keep the teachers in the loop all the time so that they are part of the input. But I think that's probably a given in almost any reform. *Todd Overby*

- So far we have learned there is a deep concern about the time commitment and the money that this will cost. Like the district writing assessment, it will be reported to the public. There is concern about inservicing the staff. [The Committee] wants this to be a positive kind of assessment with no negative overtones. People are looking at taking three to five years [to do this]. *Paul Epperson*

The Use of Technology to Support Innovative Assessment

> *Really, the whole concept of portfolios is a way of facilitating the communication process, the social interaction between student and teacher; student, teacher and parent; as to what constitutes good work. So you have what technology hopes to use as a way of facilitating this communication process, so that by the time the social processes get into place the technology will be in place to support that.*
>
> *Helen Barrett*

Helen Barrett, presently at the University of Alaska Anchorage, agreed last year to develop a report for the DOE on the technological support for innovative assessment. She found several currently available software packages and was able to identify the types of emerging technology which will be available soon. Products identified ranged from the computerized working portfolio to full-motion video incorporated into a portfolio, to writeable CD's which can store a student's work from Kindergarten through High School on the same disc.

The technology is evolving rapidly, and Barrett believes the future will be in optical products, rather than magnetic ones. Of especial interest will be products such as the Newton

Personal Digital Assistant, which allows teachers to write on a screen and store information on discs the size of a credit card.

The DOE also asked Barrett to explore a dissemination strategy for her research, and she developed a one-credit course, which she has so far conducted for Chapter I teachers in Anchorage. She will also be presenting her research at the Joint Partnerships Conference in November.

Barrett doesn't see teachers rapidly coming forward to embrace technology assisted assessment. "What I heard from [teachers in the course] is that it's something else they are going to have to do on top of a busy schedule, an add on. It doesn't replace anything they are already doing. We're not talking about taking anything away, and I think that's a real concern...I see it from the perspective of saving the teacher time, but some teachers don't see it from that perspective because they're still holding onto the old methods they had to use, they're not eliminating the things they did before. "

After all of Barrett's work, the basic question of 'why use technology to support the portfolio process' reduces to time and space management. "It gives the teachers a management tool that helps overcome some of the cumbersomeness that managing a portfolio in a file folder [becomes]. It gets to be a real space-consuming, time-consuming process, and you start to come across ethical issues. Who does it belong to...Combining technology and assessment brings up some ownership issues. When you take examples of student work, copy them into the computer, give [the work] back, you avoid that whole ownership issue."

Teacher time and the attitude changes necessary for incorporation of technology into the process of assessment aren't the only concerns Barrett's research has raised. She is also concerned about the press nationally for measurement of educational progress using the traditional types of standardized tests, and the apparent roadblock this will be for innovative assessment.

"I'm involved with the National Head Start Public School Transition project, as the Anchorage coordinator. There are 32 projects all over the country; Anchorage is one. It's a big study. I'm appalled at the measures they're using to assess student development-- The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, The Woodcock Johnson...do they know words, can they identify pictures...I was showing the Grady Profile [at a national meeting of project coordinators] and talking to them about how we could gather data, have students talk for a minute about a best friend or pet, get a sample of how they can speak, scan in how they can write...And their basic statement is 'you can't present that to Congress if you can't reduce to numbers and levels of significance.' It's very difficult to standardize on authentic measures. You can't compare a portfolio to other students. You have to be able to boil it down."

Commonalities and Observations Across Projects

Go Slow, Go Slow, Go Slow

This was the most frequent recommendation from central office or the principals interviewed. Not only are teachers perceived to need gradual introduction to the process, they are also perceived to be the primary "workers" in both development and implementation. With

resources for creating time for teacher decision making perceived to be scarce, the best compromise position for success and teacher involvement appears to be beginning small. This is generally seen as beginning with one subject area. Language Arts continues to be the entry point of choice for districts.

Discipline Orientation

The discipline orientation for assessment projects persists. Only one project mentioned trying to take a "whole child" approach. Methods which spring from writing assessment--e.g. the scoring rubric--appear to be having widespread impact as portfolios are extended to other subject areas.

From Small Seeds...

Small amounts of seed money appear to be sufficient to allow teachers to work through some of the very complex questions associated with alternatives in assessment. Individual teachers are most willing to learn from one another, and from teachers in other districts. The Instructional Improvement Academies and Consortia which meet during the summer months continue to be a format for impacting teacher development--as well as the involvement of teachers as instructors in district inservices.

"Portfolio" is Too Limiting

The use of a portfolio of samples of student work may be the beginning for many teachers, but the terminology and methodology is rapidly expanding beyond this orientation. Performance testing, for instance, was more often mentioned this year than portfolios. The definition of a portfolio is more likely to be a metaphor for all of the demonstrations of student ability, rather than an actual folder, or even a box.

Technology to the rescue?

Technological support, generally in the form of computer record keeping, is seen as a way to save teachers time and space. In more than one project, however, the lack of teacher familiarity with the technology is seen as foreshortening the help which is already available.

Children are Responding Well

It is now convincingly demonstrated that children, even very young children, respond positively to the innovative assessment methods teachers are trying. The term "fun" continued to pop up in interviews. Children need not be aware that assessment is taking place, although those who participate in their own assessment also seem to respond positively.

Student-Led Parent Conferences

The student-parent communication which evolves from the student-led parent conferences, continues to be a major plus in all projects in which it is tried. Everyone--teacher, student and parent--seems to respond enthusiastically to this method. Support for conducting the conferences, generally in some type of release time, appears to be necessary for them to be

effectively installed. These conferences would probably not be possible if it were not for the portfolio methodology, as the portfolio of student work provides the medium for student-parent sharing.

Conclusions and Recommendation

Dividends from Release Time

When one considers the millions of dollars wasted on change efforts in education, the best "bang for the buck," as the Alaska Department of Education's seed money for innovative assessment shows clearly, is money for release time for teacher planning and conferencing. If districts have, as a result, concerns about the time students spend with substitutes, schools might take the lead of Denali Elementary in Fairbanks which, while their teachers were in training each Friday morning under a Nabisco grant, had a consistent cadre of substitutes, substitutes who then worked the afternoon alongside of the teacher in the classroom to practice the techniques the teachers were learning. Providing meaningful, integrated activities for substitutes familiar with the curriculum and the children should take care of any such criticism.

Beware Bandwagon and Backlash...

Altering assessment practices appears to ultimately come to two gates--one which is slowly creaking open, and one which is still firmly rusted shut. Forcing the creaking gate of teacher behavior change, which, these reports show, is beginning to open of its own accord, may well lead to the kind of slap against the fence which sends the gate crashing shut again. Thus the recommendation from administrators to "go slow" has great merit. "Burnout" has long been acknowledged as a most real phenomenon mitigating against institutionalization of changes. Starting with one area of learning to assess in a new fashion, and biting off the process in small chunks, appears to be the only viable strategy in a system which asks teachers to learn about changing behavior, practice changing behavior, reflect about changing behavior, adjust their own and cycle through this process again--all while continuing with existing expectations.

...But Bring on the Battering Ram

There is a rising voice, however, that emerges in this report which recommends we all put our shoulder to that other gate--or rather wall--of entrenched assessment practices which, though statistically quantifiable, are not seen by educators as accurate or appropriate. These practices should not be more important than the more authentic ones emerging simply because a) they are traditional and b) they are statistically aggregateable. The emerging concern over the use of innovative assessment information in reporting to funding agents, and to the public, needs immediate and forceful attention. If we run this scenario to its worst case, teachers, parents and students could receive one picture of student performance from classroom-based assessment practices that reports students are doing well, and contradictory information from a standardized test which is so far from the actual instruction that teachers and students are not motivated to take it seriously, and thus performance on it continues to decline. It does little good for assessment practices to change if the criteria by which student achievement is judged do not also change.

Assessment Drives Instruction

Paul Epperson's observation that "assessment drives instruction" may well be the comment which caps all other comments. In exploring assessment, all teachers interviewed actually talked more about how their instructional methods were impacted. Karl Kowalski made the statement that if he were teaching again this year, he would be concentrating more on trying to learn about assessment than on trying new methods of teaching. In fact, the process, as Anne Germain points out, is a circular one. Teachers learn about their own methodology by accurate assessment of what it is producing for learners. Considering the low level of reported change in teacher behavior from districtwide inservice, districts might consider small incentive grants to teachers or teacher teams, or release time, to support their individual study of assessment in their classroom(s).

Discipline Based vs. Holistic Assessment

> *I am reminded of a rhyme, which, apologies to the poet, I learned as a child and could never find again, but will quote anyway, from a child's memory. "The centipede was making tracks/until a frog, in fun, said/'pray, which leg comes after which?'/This raised his mind to such a pitch/he lay distracted in a ditch/considering how to run." Whoever the poet, I honor him/her, because he/she has helped me more than any other person in my education to understand the crisis we now face in trying to achieve authentic assessment.*
>
> *Nancy Buell*

Teachers will continue to be overwhelmed with the minutia involved in careful assessment of student growth if the trend toward specifying discreet skills, knowledge and abilities continues to be discipline based, and the number of disciplines, sub-disciplines and content areas continues to expand. Assessment of "authentic" learning tasks by "authentic" means was never intended, at its inception, to mean that authentic tasks be striated by discipline area, and each piece of each content area within each discipline assessed by a rubric.

So many districts, in Alaska and across the US, are now designating student outcomes which do not correspond to the traditional disciplines--outcomes such as "work as a member of a team," and "appreciate the diversity of human creativity." These outcomes will never come to pass unless we teach to them and assess them, and the processes for their assessment are not even in development in most districts.

It is recommended that someone begin to look *seriously* at more *holistic assessment*, whereby if discipline-based instruction continues, the assessment of learning crosses disciplines and focuses on broad categories of performance or conceptual learning. Dave Gillam's concern that he find a way to assess Science process skills exclusive of "all of the others" (e.g. communication skills, one presumes), is speaking to this conclusion and recommendation. Communication of process knowledge in Science, or problem solving ability in Mathematics, is predicated on the Language Arts. To separate them is to make more work for the teacher, and create a quagmire of skills to be assessed, which is certainly the path back to inauthentic, discreet skill, out-of-context assessment.

On the other hand, the necessity to somehow quantify and aggregate assessment data is also necessary, for the survival of alternative methods and the eradication of inauthentic ones. It is recommended that rubrics based upon interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning be developed, so that not only is assessment more representative of student learning, but it is capable of being reported district wide, and aggregateable across districts as well.

Is Terminology Important?

In the early days of the "alternative" assessment movement, the term "authentic" may have been more aptly used, linked by Wiggins as it was to authentic work and authentic learning tasks. The way many practitioners seem to be using it now, however, separates it from the task, and conveys the impression that one type of assessment is more valid than another. As teachers Germain, Kowalski and Gillam all discuss, *authentic* assessment is that which is appropriate to the instruction and learning. Rather than selecting a new assessment strategy, such as portfolios, which will be used in all circumstances, it would seem to be important to continue to remind all professionals, parents, and students that what we seek is the accuracy of assessment, rather than any one appropriate method.

Accurate communication about goals, including appropriate terminology with shared definition, is important in all change, lest we fall into the trap Michael Fullan describes, in *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, when bandwagon enthusiasm obscures the fact that practitioners do not have a deep conceptual understanding of the intended change, and so are dooming ultimate adoption of an innovation to failure. The skeptical First Grade teachers described by Annie Calkins who, through persistence, came to a "revolution" in their thinking and now are strong advocates for portfolios, are also what Fullan describes as the loyal opposition more necessary to change efforts than those whose early "buy in" or "ownership" is so eagerly sought by change agents. Though Calkins talks with some understandable frustration about having to go back through all of the original rationale for the district's project with each new group of teachers with whom she works, this constant verbalizing of the goal and massaging of the language in which it is expressed is, potentially, what will keep progress toward the goal alive.

Appendix A

Interview Instrument
Central Office Support, Principals Staff

1. Describe the alternative or innovative assessment project in which you are engaged.

2. (If applicable) What content is being assessed in this fashion?

3. (If applicable) Did you set standards in advance for levels of performance?

4. (If applicable) How did you decide to assess this particular content in this fashion?

5. (If applicable) Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

6. What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

Interview Instrument
Teacher

1. How would you describe what you are trying to do with innovative assessment in your classroom?

2. Why did you decide to try assessing [this particular content] *(substitute the specifics given in question one to personalize)* in this way?

3. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

4. What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

Appendix B

District Project Narratives

The following narrative descriptions of projects funded wholly or partially by the Alaska Department of Education during 1991-92 are verbatim or paraphrased transcriptions of phone conversation between Nancy Buell and teacher, principals or central office support personnel in the various districts. Involved personnel were identified by the Alaska DOE, and in turn identified others who might be appropriate to interview. Conscientious effort has been made to report objectively and to use the participant's words whenever possible, with minimal editing. All questions but the "What have you learned..." question have been summarized, since, in many cases, all questions did not relate.

Anchorage School District
Susitna Elementary School
Sonja Hawkins, Principal

Project: Continue development of the portfolio system, and student-led parent conferences; expand into the area of Science.

Susitna Elementary's pioneering work in the portfolio and student-led parent conferences has been well documented elsewhere (see 1991 version of this report). Principal Sonja Hawkins stated that teacher Dave Gillam has been working this year to develop a rubric for Science at the second grade. Science, she asserted, is more difficult than Language Arts and Mathematics, where there are "some clear-cut kinds of things." The project is proceeding "slowly," because she is "trying to keep away from the product and look at the process."

Hawkins supported release time for Gillam ("a great staff member who has been in Science for many years") and others who worked with him through the grant. "He went to a national conference...there was more of a need [in Science] of somebody to gather up information, data and research what's being done." The assessment of Science process skills means that "we would like to have children do some performance...[Language Arts] writing samples can be anything."

One key aspect of Susitna's program over the years has been their energetic and committed steering committee. However, according to Hawkins, "the committee hasn't met on this yet. The committee--the whole school--is looking at Math this year." While the Science area is in development, Hawkins is trying to provide personal support. "I'm really trying to keep this from becoming another checklist ."

Gillam agreed, and admitted that he is having difficulty with his development. He is in the "process of modification after what I did this summer. I thought I knew where I was headed, and then I attended the Science consortium in Fairbanks," where conversation with others convinced him that the task was more complex.

"At the Science consortium, I discovered there was more need to explore, to try to figure out how to quantify what the exploration is the kids are doing and how that fits into the process skills in Science. The rubric part of the process skills...[is difficult]. I was trying to look at

process skills, and develop a rubric for them. Within the content area, in second grade, what would be the important areas [to assess]?" The complexity comes, according to Gillam, in trying to "come up with an assessment of a process skill that doesn't also involve all of the other skills."

"What I was trying to come up with was something that would be standardized, so that I could look at what the kids' responses were in terms of specific questions asked about the task. [For example,] were they making the generalizations or not making the generalizations? I was trying to look at their responses in terms of when they responded to the questions, some consistencies that show they really understand, and 'these are the kinds of responses I got when they were making generalizations, and these were the kinds of responses they were making when they weren't.'"

Susitna's "whole school" effort this year focuses on Math. The process for developing the Math rubric was, according to Hawkins, complicated by the "Report Card" initiative, and the district's strategic planning effort. She perceived that it was important to tie all of the initiatives together. "I'm trying to keep it focused so that they can overlap. I didn't want to look at the Math this way, but I'm trying to tie it all in. [So] we looked at computation skills because these are low."

Though assessing process skills are a challenge, Hawkins feels it is an important one. "Pragmatically, it's difficult to do authentic assessment. Science is a process, mathematics thinking is a process. This all fits into authentic assessment so nicely: it's the way we look at elementary Science. We're trying to move it away from the knowledge and into the process. I've been aware of, for example, the Getty Institute, and things that are coming out on scanning and observation. We're also exploring [process skills in] art. Our portfolio is constantly heading toward how the process is going and how kids are demonstrating [what they know]."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

Sonja Hawkins:

"Utilizing the knowledge of the teachers puts the teachers in truly a professional [mode]. You really have to listen; we're training ourselves to listen to kids and observe kids. For me, as an administrator, it was actually listening to the staff and observing teachers."

David Gillam:

"I was playing around with authentic assessment last year, and what I found was that while the task was authentic, the assessment wasn't. I think the most important thing is that with authentic assessment, whatever you're going to do with the kids has to relate in some way to whatever they use in their particular school. In Anchorage, they need to be tied to the kits that the kids do, so the assessment isn't unrelated to what they're doing. If we study birds, and you're trying to assess if they can make generalizations, it has to have something to do with birds.

"Start with the most important two or three process skills and really focus in on those, and don't try to do ten or twelve, which is what I started out doing. Don't try to do it all."

Anchorage School District
Tom Straugh, Assessment and Evaluation

Project: Repeat the Susitna teacher-led course on portfolio development for both new Susitna staff and staff of Eagle River, Fairview, Ravenwood and Homestead Elementary Schools.

Funds provided by the Alaska DOE facilitated the expansion of the successful Susitna Elementary portfolio process to other elementary schools. According to Assessment and Evaluation Specialist Tom Straugh, "Fairview actually began the process and had the most schoolwide success." In the other schools, teachers were able to develop "functional portfolios" and begin their use this year. Development "concentrated primarily in the area of writing," which, according to Straugh, is the "easiest place for an elementary teacher to start."

Development took place across grade levels, and was "voluntary everywhere," but "at Fairview, Ravenwood and Eagle River, they made portfolios part of their schoolwide goals--part of their Report Card."

The project started a "seed group" at each school. Straugh said that the "seed groups working together feed off of each other. Some are using the parent conference as a piece--it is a variable. More and more of the teachers are moving toward student-led parent conferences. Those who have moved in that direction are very pleased."

Straugh is also working on extracting data from the portfolio. "The entire Susitna building had writing portfolios last year." The goal, for Straugh, is to show growth as part of the district assessment process through the portfolio method. This effort requires evaluation to be part of the development process. "You need to be proactive in development of rubrics with staff if you want to gather any consistent data. If they have a rubric training, they use it, and the child learns about the rubric--it's a real powerful way to teach writing. As teachers do more teaching writing with a rubric, it makes it more possible to record scores with the rubric in mind. If they haven't done scoring with a rubric, they can still sit together and pull out data across several pieces and get a single score. Reliability of the scoring is higher with a rubric."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"This is a project that's worth doing slowly. It's a project that's so important that people need to start slowly and not get burned out. Start with one area and learn it well, working with it. Don't try to do eight areas with parent conferences in all eight areas by the end of the first nine weeks."

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Leslie Gordon, Teacher
Badger Road Elementary

Project: Develop "hands on" tubs containing all the equipment, supplies and instructions to test district Science process skills.

Badger Road Elementary is a Science magnet school. Leslie Gordon, a Badger Road teacher, observed, "We were noticing that the district highlighted process skills as the most important, but there were no process skill tests. We decided to develop process skill pre- and post-tests for every grade level." Hands-on tests were developed and housed in "big tubs" which included a teacher's manual, a worksheet for students, or, for the younger children, for the volunteer parents who did the testing to use. According to Gordon, the developers--herself and a teacher from each grade level--included everything that was needed to teach each skill in each kit.

Because "hands on" Science activities were familiar to students, Gordon doesn't feel most students were aware that they were being assessed, though she thought "some might be." She stated, "It's just another hands-on activity. Last week I did the magnet activity, and kids got so interested they ignored the assessing." However, she contrasted this sharply with a college Science methods class she taught. "On the other hand, the class I teach at the U for teachers in training...[had]...very great difficulty. They want to be able to ask and get an answer, and we don't teach like that. And they have a real hard time coming around and getting back into hands on, which is what they have to do in getting back into the classroom. And the elementary kids don't have trouble at all."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"Since we just did the pretest this year, it would be just a sort of forecast, but I think mostly having this [process skills assessment kit] in [teachers'] hands and having them know these are the identified skills means the focus is going to change in those classrooms. Teacher accountability and interest is what's going to change."

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Chris Williams, Principal, Ladd Elementary School (project year principal Birch Elementary)

Project: Continue development of Birch Elementary primary-level portfolios, and the parent conferencing which has become a part of the portfolio process.

At Birch Elementary School, primary-level portfolios begun two years ago reflect developmental stages in Language Arts (most prominently reading, writing and spelling, with one assessment of speaking in midyear) and mathematics, and include a social/emotional checklist. The portfolios were used for parent conferencing, and Birch teachers spent the first conference in October training parents to understand the portfolio system. Students were involved in selecting the writing pieces which are included in the portfolio. (Teacher reactions were reported in the 1991 version of this report.)

The first portfolio was used with control groups at "different grade levels," and other teachers developed the portfolio further, modifying the original design. Chris Williams, principal at Birch during the development of the process, stated, "By the end of the time we were able to compare. We found out that what we originally developed was fairly awkward, and not

getting all of the information in the manner in which we wanted it. We wanted to do more than just language. We had used a lot of models that had been developed by companies, but weren't really pertinent to what we were doing and what we needed. We kept the behavior checklist we developed, and honed down, and then got into some of the Math. We got involved particularly in the Kindergarten with attention and listening skills."

Last year, work at Birch had progressed to "where we were honing it and happy with it. We had gotten to a point where we were starting to work into it a whole child assessment rather than just Language Arts...and Math. We would have developed some pre- and post-tests that could be standardized, besides just sampling behavior and checklists, just for accountability purposes."

A portfolio system, according to Williams, needs to be tied in to the districtwide assessment model. "We discovered that [while] people in the district were saying that we were doing a neat job...we still were tied into the ITBS...I felt we needed to establish ourselves in the area of portfolio assessment and say we can get a similar kind of data using the portfolio. We need benchmark data in order to do this. I have a strong assessment and testing background. I knew we would be ignored, would still have to go through what is not age-appropriate testing for these kids." Williams indicated that the establishment of such benchmarks was to have been the next step at Birch.

This fall, principal Chris Williams has moved to the new Ladd Elementary. While she hopes to bring the successes of the portfolio and parent conference system to Ladd, she spoke with concern about the program at Birch. "It turned out very good, but it needs to be continued. When you do something good, then it's dropped because the funding is dropped, you wonder, why? My guess is, because it's not funded and it's not supported anymore, individual teachers will do things, but it won't be done in a consistent, schoolwide way."

Birch parents have continued to support the program, Williams noted. "Parents liked it so well they were willing to partially fund it...[They] really enjoyed it and wanted to know why" support had been cut. Even though support was minimal, it was critical, according to Williams, because the project required a "tremendous amount of commitment on the part of teachers and administrators." Funds from the Alaska Department of Education and the school district assisted Birch teachers to "plan and develop models." They used inservice work days, and "a great deal of personal time."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"Basically, I think when we take the time to help parents understand how children are assessed, and we can produce results that are visible, that parents can sit down and see, we find that we have parents who are really supporting our system. We have parents who understand the developmental process of kids, when we take the time to train them. Not only did we present portfolio [contents], but [during] our initial, October meeting, the majority of time was spent teaching and training parents. And then, initially, before they saw their child's portfolio we developed a little pamphlet about portfolios...It was a small school, and they didn't have much, but parents were willing to donate $1000 to keep the program going. And they were out talking about it; parents are our strongest support."

Juneau Douglas School District
Lynn Williams, Mathematics Teacher Trainer
Mendenhall River

Project: Funds are being used to bring in a mathematics assessment consultant, Karen Higgins of the University of Oregon, in to work with teachers on alternative assessment grades 3-8.

Lynn Williams, a Mathematics Teacher Trainer stationed most of the time in the Mendenhall River School, supported the training done by Higgins (teaching a credit class and working with a teacher research group. Funds were also used to buy books on assessment to share in the class). She said that she felt an outside expert was necessary because "most of the resources we've seen published are K-2. We're looking at upper grades." Williams hopes to see teachers conducting research about the types of alternative assessment they are using in their classrooms.

She has devoted her personal energy to trying to get alternative mathematics assessment going because "Most of our assessment has to do with computation. All of the AMC standards are saying to de-emphasize that. We need to find out about how children are thinking, problem solving, etc. I don't think you can do that by a paper-pencil test. Also, I think it doesn't allow you to evaluate what children can do in cooperative groups, and that's an important part of Math training."

The district has been involved for the past two years in portfolio assessment in Language Arts, and has committed to moving the portfolio system up one grade each year. According to Williams, "Standards are moving up through the elementary for writing and reading, but a lot of people are interested in doing something besides paper and pencil testing." She selected Higgins to help teachers get started because "[she] doesn't encourage people to go full-blown alternative assessment at once." The strategy is, "take a piece and work on that piece," which Williams believes is "not so overwhelming. There are very few people who can jump into portfolio assessment right off the bat."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"I'm using Math learning logs, and have children [keep] a problem solving notebook to write their strategies for problem solving. So I do some assessment on that. I'm really pleased. What is really exciting is to see children expand their ways of thinking and expand their approaches. For instance, I was working with children to count twelve things, and one child said, "I know there are 12 because I counted them." Another child said, "I counted them by 2's," and then the children began to offer other strategies. After they had shared these, you could see them using the various strategies in the next problem. Once children become aware of different ways, they'll use them."

Juneau Douglas School District
Annie Calkins, Curriculum Director

Project: Continue development of the districtwide portfolio assessment by expanding into the second grade. Provide release time for teachers to participate in planning.

Juneau has mandated portfolio assessment for all teachers, adding one grade per year. The project began in planning three years ago, and this year is beginning planning with the third grade teachers. A grade is added each year. Annie Calkins, who has directed the project since its inception, said that teams of third grade teachers are already identifying where they wish to begin, and that the portfolio process continues to evolve.

The district has just published a second edition of their popular portfolio handbook. They have acted upon their commitment reported two years ago to make sure that teachers have computer support for the portfolio process. "All first and second grade teachers have Mac LC's and are in the process of finishing training on how to use them to generate the teacher narratives which are one facet of the Language Arts portfolio." Calkins reports that "in the evaluations we did at the end of the year with the first grade [teachers], people were highly enthusiastic about how the computers helped them with the narratives. Some are using them for the reading attitude survey and during writing conferences" to record student growth concerns.

In discussing the computerized portfolio systems on the market, such as the Grady Profile, Calkins said that teachers had seen a demonstration, but it was "too much, too fast, too big," referring to the computer proficiency needed by teachers. She expressed concern that many teachers had no previous experience with computers. "They think it's a nice goal for the future, so we're just trying to trying to sort out our own" use at this point.

In addition to the K-2 process in place, and the development at the third grade, pilots are going on at fourth, fifth and sixth grades, where teachers perceive that "students are older and can do more of their own work on the computer." At these intermediate grades, "there's been more interaction and more movement toward the Grady-type portfolio."

Going to a districtwide portfolio assessment system is, according to Calkins, a tremendous effort. "For us, we're doing everybody in the district; this is not a voluntary option. So we have to be constantly going back in meetings with teachers, representing the goal, representing that parents think this is a good idea...the inner dynamics of all of that requires lots of vigilant tending to the process and how the process gets put in place."

Calkins credits computer technology with helping to convince teachers, not just with inputting information, but with storage. "People are saying, 'look at this--we'll need a moving van'; and I'm saying, 'look at this disc.' The district purchased scanners for each team of five teachers in the first and second grades, and teachers are using these to store student work.

Another area of challenge is the transition in Kindergarten between oral and written language, and the development of benchmarks and standards. Compatibility of teacher generated standards and the Alaska 2000 initiative is also a question. Calkins stated, "We continue to communicate with people across the country and are trying to influence the Chapter I legislation, and how we can put in place a system of alternative assessment that is not NCE based."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"The first grade people...it's so interesting...this is their third year of doing districtwide. I had a long chat with a couple of them who, two years ago, were outspoken against the project, hostile in public meetings. I wanted to talk with them now about the stuff that they've learned, and it has revolutionized the way they think about instruction and assessment." These teachers offered to talk to the upper grade teachers who are reluctant to participate, to share their positive feelings. "That part has been real encouraging, but it truly is a huge shift for teachers. I did a couple of workshops outside of Seattle. Their list of concerns and questions [showed a] whole lot of fear of doing anything different, subjectivity, issues."

Ketchikan Gateway Borough Schools
Teacher Anne Germain

Project: Investigate the way children think mathematically at the fifth and sixth grade levels, and develop appropriate assessment strategies.

Teachers Anne Germain and Earlene Brown conducted Piaget Conservation tests and found that "some of the things we were asking [fifth and sixth grade students] to do were inappropriate....We wanted some time to research and read what was current in Math assessment, and develop some models and try them out with kids." Germain and Brown hoped to find that there was an appropriate method for assessing Mathematics problem solving at the upper elementary level, and to present this method to their peers at one of the state's instructional improvement academies.

The decision was made to look at alternative methods of assessment in mathematics in the intermediate grades because, according to Germain, "there are lots and lots in primary...I came from primary with all of this support and information, and they gave me a textbook. And I kept thinking, there's got to be a better way to...teach mathematics to this age group and to assess them." Marilyn Burns, whose company, The Math Solution, is distributed through Quisenairre, provided ideas via the Alaska Math Consortium. Then, Germain said, "We got involved with the Alaska Teacher Research Network and proposed to do a research project: 'What enables children to transfer problem solving strategies taught in Math to other areas?'" Brown and Germain have just begun to work on this latter project, and have been exploring ways to combine their fifth and sixth grade students based on thinking styles. They are also doing Math centers, where students are provided with a menu of challenge activities. "Lots of new things came out of this for us, and lots of growth."

But no "best model." According to Germain, "There's no one model. There are many ways to assess, and they are so linked to instruction, it's difficult to separate the two...We thought we were going to have a package...There were, instead, many, many ways, and you have to determine which is appropriate for the task." Methods Germain and Brown found included taking informal notes and putting those in a folder, student self-assessment, students keeping track of their own progress, students writing and explaining what they know, interviewing, and Math portfolios.

Students were aware of the teachers' efforts to assess in different ways. Mostly, Germain said, this is due to the fact that, following hearing Terry Austin, from Fairbanks, "we ended up doing student-led conferences. Kids have their own gradebooks, scoring graphs, and keep track of their own progress--all subjects, not only Math--and they figured out what grade they should get." Grades were not only based on scores, but also included student assessment of "responsibility, effort, and a write-up about what their grade was and how they felt about it." Students chose papers from their portfolio to back up their grade. When they conferenced with the parents, they led the conference. "We talked about how to present yourself, how to dress. It became one of the most successful things I've ever done in 12 years of teaching. It was almost like if you went for a job interview. They sat down and opened up the portfolio..."

Associated skills also improved, and attitudes changed. "They also learned how to write, a topic sentence and the supporting ideas. It was more of a self-reflective, self-assessment type of thing for the kids. It was very interesting because they had never viewed themselves as learners--they just came to school. So when we asked them, how do you feel about yourselves as learners, they said, 'huh?' We had kids who got F's, but even though they had an F, they said, 'yes, I had an F and this is why...and here is my strategy for bringing this grade up.' In the past the parent said, 'why did you have an F?' and they said, ' don't know; she doesn't like me.' Students had their parent's undivided attention. The conferences took 45 minutes. The kids were really excited; they practically floated out of the room. Evaluation from the parents was wonderful. To see their child in a different light, to communicate. We had 100% parent attendance."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"It is the student-led conferences."

Kodiak Borough School District
Robbie Ward, Director of Federal Programs

Project: Provide information to teachers in K-1 assessment practices; provide Kindergarten and first grade teachers the opportunity to confer and reflect about the information.

Robbie Ward, Director of Federal Programs in the Kodiak Island Borough School District, explained that with site-based management, her main function is to "provide information to teachers, and then those in the individual schools make up their minds," about portfolio assessment. Information has come in the form of "educating teachers in what other districts are doing, taking teachers to other districts [i.e. to the primary restructuring workshop in Mat-Su], and also bringing people to our district (i.e. Annie Calkins from Juneau and Mary Carolyn Ramsaur from Fairbanks) to provide some awareness of what other districts are doing." At this point, Kodiak is "strictly working with K-1 teachers, and inviting second grade teachers to meetings for information only."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"I have a survey out to our teachers and we're going to be holding another meeting in about three weeks. I have a real concern of portfolios being mandated in any school district. The variety of what teachers are doing is really quite widespread, on an individual basis. We hope to pull together our program by the end of the year. Our Kindergarten and first grade teachers have made some statements about what they will do, but every fall there are some [personnel] changes. I'm going to use this October meeting to bring the others up to speed and find out what the new teachers want to do."

Lower Yukon School District
Donna Sherrouse
Director of Curriculum

Project: provide training for district teachers in an effort to extend the existing K-1 portfolio assessment project to authentic assessment strategies for Math and Science in other grade levels.

The Lower Yukon School District is currently using the portfolio to assess all K-1 subject areas. The portfolio has replaced the report card and, according to Director of Curriculum Donna Sherrouse, it is used for "communication with parents and federal programs" as well.

This year, the district is rewriting its Mathematics curriculum and "authentic assessment will be part of the revision. A trainer from Juneau provided a two-day training workshop, and information was disseminated K-12 throughout the district....As part of this effort, teachers who came included an assessment task force for the district, representatives from the K-1 portfolio group, as well as Math and Science teachers," stated Sherrouse. The workshop looked at a variety of techniques: "critical thinking, observed behaviors, Science and Math journals, etc."

K-1 teachers are meeting again to develop a narrative with a rubric for the portfolio so there is "transitioning between grades." Sherrouse said, "I think what we're going to end up with is more than one type of portfolio: a showcase type and a growth portfolio. One is in process all of the time, so to speak. We may end up with a teacher-directed, all scored, and ITBS pencil-paper test kind of thing; and I'm hoping that at the end of the year we'll merge those." Standards for the performance in Language Arts for the K-1 portfolio are correlated with the district's reading series, and Sherrouse expects to have that in the Math curriculum as well.

The portfolio decision was made prior to Sherrouse's coming to LYSD, but she believes the project began as a result of encouragement from the Alaska DOE, which provided a workshop. It is a process she feels meets a district's need to communicate what students are doing better than the traditional grading system. K-1 teachers met several times last year with consultant Bill Buell, and Sherrouse credits him with helping teachers to expand how they were looking at what went into a portfolio. "One thing that's been very interesting...by the end of the year, kids were saying they wanted to write a journal [and were] actively involved in picking out their portfolio items for the end of the year. I think Bill Buell is a big player in that scene, because when he started teachers were hooked on checklists, and by the end of the year they were taking pictures, and *et cetera*. It really turned it around and made it real positive for us."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"I think it's just a much more positive way to communicate with parents about how children are doing in school. It's very visual and for our population that's really important. It appears to me that it's a much more positive thing...we're allowing the children to participate in the conferences, and my perception is that it's a whole lot less negative and more pleasant for us to have a parent conference in our district today than it might have been four years ago. And I've also found teachers saying, 'I'd forgotten how much children had grown until I looked back at the portfolio and I said, wow, look at what I've done.'"

Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
Chester Anderson
Principal, Cottonwood Creek Elementary School

Project: Develop and model elementary Science performance tests to accompany the Full Option Science System (FOSS)

Chester Anderson, principal at Cottonwood Creek, said he has always believed in performance tests, but has never found a program which facilitated them for teachers. The FOSS program, marketed by Britannica and field tested in California, appeared to him to be developmentally appropriate for the various grade levels, as well as utilizing the cooperative learning, hands-on approach he and the staff favored. The system came with a performance assessment tool.

The project funds allowed purchase of extra materials to put together tubs which included all of the equipment and supplies for six tables of students to complete assessment activities. "The kits came with instructions, and the grant money was also used for a [parent] who was contracted to conduct the tests. A teacher from California came in and set up" the performance testing.

Anderson felt that the FOSS system is good for the type of Science program he supports. "The company did a super job of putting together the kits, even a video for teachers." But he feels that the use of performance testing will not catch on over night. "Even with us putting the tubs together, it's still going to take two to three years for teachers to let kids go through the performance testing. A couple of teachers did the testing on their own after the consultant set it up."

Performance testing, according to Anderson, was appropriate for the type of Science teaching being done, as well as for the goals of outcome-based education in Mat-Su. The fact that this commercially prepared Science program had a performance testing component ("...built into it and materials ready to do that") was a factor in its selection. "Other programs we have just don't have that built into them. [This was the] easiest one to do it with...and the...first one I've seen with a formal test."

Anderson began searching for a Science program three years ago. He went to a Science conference and "brought back three programs for two teachers from each grade level to look into, give it a try." Two years ago, he "went to a Science conference and saw...[the FOSS system]. I bought a series of modules (one for each grade level) for teachers to try. The teachers unanimously decided to purchase the FOSS program." From that decision, units were purchased for the whole school and all the teachers. "In year four, where we are now, we're going to teach all of the units and evaluate them. I am probably the one [who is responsible for pressing for performance testing]. I keep hearing so much about product testing, performance testing. Teachers like it, and they all agree that we need to be assessing kids."

Performance standards for the tests were set by the company. "We didn't have to do too much thinking. These people knew what they were doing...scientists and people who understood kids' development." While the performance test results did not become the entire Science grade for the students, it was "one of their grades...considered as one of the things they did in Science when it went on the report card."

In addition to making sure that the performance tests are used, Anderson is concerned about continuing to integrate performance tests into the OBE approach. "What we are wanting to do is put together parent handbooks of what we're trying teach and what kids are expected to learn at each grade level. So we want to build this in somehow... that's where it's going to end up someday."

Students do not seem to be aware that they are being assessed differently. According to Anderson, "Kids sort of thought it was fun. I'm not sure they were looking at it really as assessment. [We approached it as,] 'Okay kids, we've had a lot of fun doing this Science unit, now let's see what you remember.' They thought it was fun."

At the last districtwide inservice, Cottonwood Creek's teachers conducted two sessions to demonstrate the kits to their peers from other schools.

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"I really believe in it; we need to be doing more performance assessment. Feasibility: it's tough for teachers to get into this--an administrator really needs to get behind it. You may have it happen just in pockets. The assessment is there as part of the unit, and they expect the teacher to do it, but in my experience, elementary teachers are trying to teach Math, teach reading, holistic writing...We've always talked about hands-on Science, but to be quite honest, I haven't really seen that happening because of the time commitment. I went into every teacher's room, and every time I saw it happening. The last step is performance assessment. Teachers will use class activities ['okay, the kid did it'] or fall back on older type regurgitation of facts. [These are] easier to do. I don't have any evidence of that, just a feeling. Maybe the performance testing would happen anyway. But I don't think so, because it's the end of the unit, you have to collect all of these things, set up the tables, etc."

Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
Mardene Collins, Linda Volkman, Cathy Walter and Ray DePriest

Teacher Interdisciplinary Team
Colony Middle School

Project: Develop portfolios containing evidence of competence in Math, Science, Language Arts and Social Studies, and a rubric for sharing this during student-led conferences.

Mardene Collins is part of an interdisciplinary team working with seventh graders at Colony Middle. The Department of Education funded their pilot of Math and Science portfolios, and the principal, John Norman, funded the Language Arts and Social Studies development. "We were trying to use the portfolio as a presentation of self," said Collins. "A presentation of self needs an audience, so we initiated a program of student-led parent conferences."

The four teachers "just acted as facilitators." Collins said, "We set up Science Lab in eight pods, and eight conferences were going on at one time. We have over 120 students. We used one full school day and one evening. The grant paid for administrative leave for us to set up the conferences and facilitate the conferences."

The four teachers initiated portfolios of "different natures and makeups. Students chose their favorite pieces of work, or what they were interested in from each of the four subject areas." According to Collins, "We also included an essay on work habits and study skills, and whether they had met goals for each of the four core areas.

"We had them do a post-conference evaluation ('what I would have done differently, was I well prepared') and we had parents do post-conference evaluation, too ('Did it have any meaning for you, was it more beneficial than traditional conferences, did you learn more about your child'). We asked permission to video some of the conferences, so we have a few on video. We modeled conferences for students. There was some apprehension and anxiety, but kids did very well. Feedback from parents was very positive. There were a few negatives, which was to be expected. Some parents thought it was wonderful and told the principal; some parents used it as an opportunity to 'unload' about things they didn't like."

Collins indicated that the need to increased student self-esteem was one reason to initiate the portfolio system and student-led conferences. "We do not have any kind of parent-teacher or student-parent communication...built into our system at all. We have the traditional parent-teacher conferences. So what we wanted to do, because this is traditionally the age that ends up falling through the cracks...[was create]...a time where [this could take place]. We really felt there was something missing as far as students being able to communicate with the parents. The portfolios forced them to reflect on their work and what they had really learned, think about anything that they might have learned."

And the teachers' observation was that "It did affect self-esteem. Students took it to heart. Teachers had a conference folder for each of them, and wrote a note of encouragement in the front for each ('this is new for all of us; if you need help, we will be there to help'). But we tried not to get into the conference. We wanted the student to share, and not have grades be a focus of the conference. We encouraged parents who wanted to conference with the teacher to schedule at another time. Students greeted their parents at the door and took their folder and [sat down to explain it]. Some had chosen a Science project, some the Math manipulatives.

Students wanted the Math manipulatives in the Science Lab so they could show their folks how to use them. We had refreshments--the best part was the refreshments, except the gray poupon."

How did teachers know that students were positively affected? "A lot was in their demeanor--we could see a sense of pride in their demeanor. In the post-conference evaluations, they said they liked doing what they had done. I think once they got over the initial apprehension and anxiety, they really got into it. Some lasted well into an hour. The positive aspect: it was the first time some had been able to sit down with a parent without any interruptions. They said things like 'I don't have enough time to study, a place to study, we're always gone.' Some parents said, though, 'my student and I communicate anyway.' But they still really liked the idea that their child would be doing this. Some parents felt they had already shared this and knew all about it.

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"Well, I think overall that this was such a positive experience. Some of the things we used, the planning that went into it, the mechanics of it...It took a lot for us to get it off the ground. We will definitely do it again. We won't have administrative leave time built in...[for] planning time, the day for conferences, refreshments. We had subs in the regular classroom then. We'll probably end up having to do them maybe a couple of evenings this year. I think it's the whole idea of expanding the network of who's involved in school and who we communicate with. We need to have other audiences for student work and make it not only meaningful to them, but important to share with others."

Northwest Arctic School District
Karl Kowalski, Teacher

Project: Funds provided hands on Science equipment and portfolio materials for students to use in recording their Science knowledge in a variety of ways.

Karl Kowalski involved his fourth grade students in building "portfolio boxes" or "treasure chests," in which to store "everything important in Science to them. Some things were required, and some they got to choose. I required one copy of a video, and some drawings were required. I knew how they performed on written tests--the last thing they needed was more of that. We kept drawings, sketches, a log book [daily journal]; we drew pictures. For some special education kids, it was mainly drawing."

Kowalski wanted to use a different type of assessment in Science because "I'm a scientist by training. I have an elementary degree and biology degree. It was always something that was fun to teach, but I was always at a loss to see how kids were learning." Kowalski wanted to look at process skills, and generated the method himself. "It did become part of the grade," he stated. "I didn't set a standard for what needed to be in there; I wanted to find out what the students were thinking. I think I learned more than they did. When I watched the video, I came up with a checklist for understanding how many times they used Science vocabulary, did they have the process down. So it was mainly just a checklist, and as I watched the video I used the checklist and arbitrarily assigned points. The same with the daily log: did they have the concept. Were

they able to apply it to something they know. I went into their portfolio box. I looked at journals, wrote comments, put an evaluation in their portfolio box. Comments were their private comments. It did become part of a grade on the report card in the sense that when I came up with the rubric I was trying to take away the subjectivity and I came up with a number of points that were added into the grade."

Students appeared not to connect the "treasure chest" with assessment. "I told them, but I don't think it hit them. I ordered some of those fold-together cardboard boxes, pencil, paper, pens--I think they got lost in the let's have fun doing it rather than [we're being tested]. I felt like it was very positive. It turned out to be a lot more work for me than a pencil and paper test is, but I think I learned more about what the kids are learning in Science than if I had given them a pencil and paper test."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"Even though it does take more time, we have to remember that we have to meet the needs of individual kids in our classroom...We have to give them different opportunities to show us back what they've learned. If I were teaching this year I think I'd be spending more of my time trying to find...creative ways to assess, rather than trying to learn new ways to teach.

"The most important aspect...turned out to be the videotape. I noticed that in walking around the room I don't pick up nearly as much as when I can examine the tape at home. Lo and behold that quiet kid was actually paying attention and doing the processing in her head, and would say to the rest of the team that looked frantically busy, 'why don't you try this.' That's something I might have missed.

"In assessment you have to look at how you can count what you're having kids do as ways to get to a concept you've presented. A lot of it becomes a justification game. People are hesitant to use a drawing, say, as an assessment device--but nobody questions a test. It shouldn't be any different. You just have to think, 'how is this related to the concept I'm trying to teach.'"

Railbelt School District
Kathleen Formella
Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

Project: Secondary Language Arts writing portfolio.

Railbelt secondary Language Arts teachers have been working with a writing portfolio. According to Kathleen Formella, "We just met and talked about this: innovative assessment seems like such heavy duty terminology for what we feel like we've done. We see this meeting a real classroom-based need, but we're not sure about its application beyond that...We're still wrestling with the idea of how this fits assessment, per se. Teachers have a clearer picture after working with a pilot for a year of how it meets their classroom needs for assessment, but we haven't tried to extend it any further than that."

Teachers have been working with the components of writing that are looked at with the district writing assessment. "We just started to do our own writing assessment...[Teachers are looking at the] same pieces, but in a more holistic way. Essays, comparison contrast, poetry, a rough draft to final publication to see process, illustrate a cover, letter of introduction, table of contents. We tried to make the letter of introduction a reflective piece. A major portion of the portfolio is student choice but we also have some required pieces [called modes]. This is a big issue--student choice vs. teacher mandate."

The project began because those teachers who were working with the writing assessment expressed a strong interest in doing it. "We've really been trying to look at our secondary program in general and look at curricular improvements in that area." The school board's Report Card goals were focused on secondary also, and the DOE incentive funds caused the effort to "come together." "It is a goal for this year to bring in content area teachers and orient them to the portfolio project."

Standards for last year's preliminary effort in portfolio development were not necessarily set in advance, nor were portfolios necessarily graded. This was at individual teacher option. According to Formella, "Teachers may have graded it in some way, but if so, it was more of a participation/completion grade."

Formella stated, "Students read each other's and wrote written responses. We took an afternoon and read student portfolios and wrote notes back to the students. The students' general reaction was positive. We were a little tight on timeline; we did second semester. Now that we'll be doing a full year, kids are feeling a sigh of relief. They'll have more time to pull it together. This year they're ready for it, asking about it, thinking about pieces to save. It's amazing how far that one semester has taken us, really. Student reactions are positive. The reactions of other teachers was extremely positive, also. Students who weren't seen as having a lot of talent or expertise put together a lot of neat stuff."

Teacher Karen Harris saw great potential for both student involvement and student self-esteem enhancement. "We had always collected kids' writing in folders as they turned it in...It just followed them through, it didn't have any purpose or closure...There would be a celebratory thing, but that was the end of it. Now, what we're doing...students are involved in selecting the pieces they want to showcase. Students are getting more involved in the evaluation process of their own writing. They're having to reflect more on what is a good piece of writing. We're limiting them to 10 pieces for the year.

"What I like is I'm finding out more about how important it is to kids to have their material read and shared. More time was given to this. Last year was the first year we had response time. A group of teachers read and responded back to them. I responded to writing from kids in another school who didn't have me for a teacher...It was wonderful, they were very excited. They wanted to see if other people had read their piece. Last year was rushed; when we evaluated as a class they all said we want more time.

Harris liked seeing "what other kids were doing in other schools. I love reading students' writing. I really enjoyed seeing what other kids were doing and responding to them, giving them a real pat on the back and encouraging them. And now, this year, although we haven't really let the cat out of the bag, the kids already had a sense of what it is. We're really expecting to benefit from that this year.

"The parent involvement is a real exciting part of it for me. Last year when I had parent conferences I could bring their writing portfolio out, and just having those there...the parents were just thrilled to see that side of their child. It's exciting for them. I think that's an aspect to this that we're going to be seeing more of. I know as a parent myself, what would I like to be able to see [actual work]."

According to Harris, the experimental nature of the portfolio project wasn't really a consideration for the students. She said that she was not sure they were aware they were being assessed. "I should ask them that question. I don't think we put it to them 'We're doing an experiment.' We just said, 'We're doing a portfolio.' I think subconsciously they had to be aware, but I really would have to say that they weren't thinking of it in terms of evaluation. When we discussed this as a group we were very leery of being evaluative. We wanted to be celebrating. We weren't going to say 'this is a good piece of writing.' The kids chose it and so it had to be valuable to them."

Harris said that individual teachers such as Brian Swett used the portfolio differently. "He took it another level--he evaluated each piece. I did not--it was more like you did it or you didn't. I had mixed feeling. I saw Brian's being more structured; I wasn't sure that was for me. Although I thought there were parts of it I wanted in there... it was more structured than I would have been. He used the rubric from the writing assessment. Each piece in there had been scored against the rubric."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

Kathy Formella

"One step at a time, I guess. When we started on this, trying to define all of the modes we wanted, still keeping student choice, or starting in every subject area, or some big project, that was kind of overwhelming. When we whittled it down, and made a specific focus, that worked well. Now we're ready to branch out."

Karen Harris

"The joy and excitement that the kids had. The enthusiasm they felt for being able to read each other's work--to take the time to enjoy and share their work. A lot of other things came out of it, too. The concern with mechanics and grammar came out because they wanted to take pride in what was in their portfolio. It's important for them to be mechanically correct now. I didn't have to beat them with a stick; it came from them. I also had kids that weren't successful in school, at risk, resource kids, who did beautiful portfolios. They could really showcase their skills. The kids who usually get good feelings were getting good feelings, but the others were too, and that was unusual."

Southwest Region School District
Janelle Cowan, Curriculum Coordinator
Todd Overby, Education Specialist

Project: Focus on mathematics "authentic" assessment at the K-2 level, and integrate this into the overall district effort to implement criterion-referenced testing. CRT's will be part of the portfolio system, as well as other methods being developed.

The Southwest Region District has developed at CRT assessment system with two categories of questions. "Alpha" questions are multiple choice, and "beta" questions are performance based. "The student has to actually choose from something to demonstrate the competency."

Janelle Cowan, Curriculum Director, says, "We're looking for a demonstration that they are able to do a task based upon learning a concept. Rather than filling in the blank, it's a performance-based assessment."

The dual assessment began in Language Arts and Math, because "These two subject areas we felt were most important. In Language Arts, we're assessing Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening; and in Math, computation and numeration, measurement, geometry and problem solving. Basically, we wanted to try to demonstrate that we were reaching some successes, having students achieve mastery of certain items and concepts, because standardized tests weren't showing that. This was a vehicle whereby we could show growth. We're trying now to come up with a district profile of the number of students who master a competency at a grade level districtwide.

"With a team of teachers, we have developed the test questions and the criteria by which they would be judged. Seventy-five percent to 80% is considered a mastery level, if they can demonstrate three of four times, for example."

So far the response to criterion reference tests has been "fairly positive. Last year was our first year. Also, unfortunately, we did fall and spring testing, due to some federal program evaluation data needed, and we also tested three times (with each version) with the alpha/beta. A lot of it was one-on-one assessment, student with teacher, and we felt that was real positive, students got a lot of attention that way.

"A major criticism was that it was way too time consuming for the teacher. This year, we've streamlined. We are only testing beta once a year, whenever the teacher feels it is appropriate. We are testing alpha three times during year. The data that comes back is inserted in each individual student portfolio, and their instructional program is designed around the competencies they need. Teachers still have to test any beta item three times, and if students pass, it's mastered. If not, goes to the next teacher [to teach and test]."

In an effort to make the testing less time-consuming, the district is attempting to computerize the process as much as possible. Todd Overby, Education Specialist for the district, is in charge of the development of the computer management part of the program.

Overby says he is "never at a loss for words to talk about the program," and is enthusiastic about the work done so far. He is using a Microsoft Works database. "Our effort to computerize the student data records revolves around an instructional management system. There are a bunch on the market. [We chose] a system called 'Diamond Peak,' developed by a

man from Colorado, who has since passed away. It's unfortunate, because we can't get an updated version, a manual, or an operator's manual. [However,] we're making it work--it works fine for what we want to do. Basically it was written in data-base form, a test item bank that we can put questions in and reference them to a particular objective. Then we develop questions or activities for that one that would be used to test the skill.

"We can put test questions into the bank, or we can use the ones that came with the bank. Teachers prefer their own questions. Then it's a test generator. We can tell it the parameters of the test, and it will construct the test. It will also grade an alpha level test using a scantron form. The information, objective by objective, goes into the student's record. We have a student management record keeping data base also. You have a class in there, say 8th grade Math, with a number of objects and a number of students, and for each student, as they are tested, it will mark them mastered or not mastered."

According to Overby, all of the objectives for Language Arts and Mathematics have been put into the system, with at least 10 alpha questions for each objective. He is currently working with a team of teachers to develop the beta-level questions. Initial questions developed by the teachers were rephrased over the summer into "yes-no" questions. Overby is also breaking the questions into "criteria" so that students can be given credit for partial mastery.

"Teachers are setting the standards," Overby said. "Teachers have been influenced by Writing Consortium rubrics, and textbooks, and are validating them by experience. [Standards from other sources have] been customized, very much so. This is how we're going to show partial mastery: a checklist is developed for every question, so the teacher can keep track of the whole class at on time. They will test three times over the year. Eighty percent performance on the three tests is mastery, above 60% is partial mastery. That all gets communicated to the next teacher through the printout in the student portfolio." The Excel program is used to display student performance on all objectives "The whole row is dark with white letters if mastered, gray if partial, white if not mastered. The teacher can go back and look at the previous year's checklist and see what criteria specifically the student is having problems with. Next year will be the first year they'll be able to do that."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

Janelle Cowan

"Read the research, and try to anticipate the numerous questions about the program. Be able to back up why you're doing what you're doing because of sound research. That's helped guide us in the program. And making sure we're doing what we're doing based upon past experience. We have steered away from some of the most controversial items--throwing out report cards, removing grade level designations--we want that to happen on its own."

Todd Overby

"If I had to narrow it down to one, [it would be,] don't try to go to outcome-based or competency based in one year. Give yourself at least five [years] to implement it and another five to refine it. Keep the teachers in the loop all the time so that they are part of the input. But I think that's probably a given in almost any reform."

Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
Paul Epperson
Director of Secondary Education

Project: Design a district-wide mathematics assessment which can be used at benchmark grades (3, 6, 8 and Transition Math/Algebra) and reported as the current Writing Assessment is reported, to staff and the public.

Paul Epperson has been working with a district committee of elementary and secondary teachers to design a "district-wide authentic Math assessment." Epperson stated that funds from the DOE grant and the district were used partially to provide inservice for K-12 staff representatives. Karen Higgins, mentioned by other districts, "got us off to a wonderful start," and now release time and donated teacher time has been utilized to make what Epperson describes as substantial progress toward the goal of having a pilot ready to begin testing after Christmas.

The team of teachers working with Epperson to develop two to four questions per grade, with a rubric for scoring, for pilot benchmark testing includes elementary representatives Mary Beaumont, Robert Dover, Bud Draper, Nancy Tipton, Janet Walker, Nancy Vait, Marcia Gusty, Gail Knobf and Carole Deemers; and secondary representatives John Christensen, Erling Hofseth, Jean Huff, Sandra Miller, Linda Ralston, Mary Sanders, Scott Richmond, John Davis, Peter Thielke, and Ed Marmon.

Much has been learned in the process, according to Epperson. "We had a problem in the beginning [in that] our mindset...was not 'authentic'...We were doing recall (except for an outstanding analytical writing assessment)...We had to figure out what is authentic, develop outcomes for our Math and then actually write our assessment tool.

"We are looking at...two to four questions at each grade level, the kind of questions that can be scored by a rubric...We're probably looking at the areas of problem solving skills and strategies, at procedural kinds of knowledge, conceptual understanding, and communication." Epperson says the group is interested in "some kind of [student] performance testing, [there] could be narration involved, and we have not discounted using groups for one of the questions. That's the direction."

What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"So far we have learned there is a deep concern about the time commitment and the money that this will cost. Like the district writing assessment, it will be reported to the public. There is concern about inservicing the staff. [The Committee] wants this to be a positive kind of assessment with no negative overtones. Right now we have a kind of a negative about our CRTs, and we're trying hard to overcome that, to involve as many people as we can, and doing it over a period of time, not trying to do one right after another. And that takes some selling to the School Board. But we have their support. In the whole scheme of things we're in a transition in our district. People are looking at taking three to five years [to do this].

"We have the University of Chicago Mathematics Project; that is our Math curriculum -- it is aligned. It parallels authentic assessment, and our style of teaching parallels authentic assessment. It's become apparent to the teachers that assessment will drive instruction, but in a more powerful positive way because they'll be getting quality feedback on analysis, evaluation, comparison and synthesis, as opposed to recall. They also realize that they're doing a lot more with authentic assessment than they thought.

"The last thing that we're discovering is that there are really three levels where assessment can take place, all related, [and] all can be authentic. The first is in the classroom. Then if we benchmark, we can have building assessments. Teachers can design assessments that are meaningful and powerful at building level, that are not reported beyond that. Though they could be, to the building's 'public.' And the third level is district assessment that can be reported to the public."

Helen Barrett
University of Alaska Anchorage

Project: Research the current and emerging technologies that can be used to support and manage innovative assessment.

Helen Barrett agreed last year to report on the technological support for alternative assessment. "I found several software packages that were currently available on the market or were coming available. I looked at a variety of possible uses of full motion video and incorporating it into a portfolio...I went from looking at the concept of a working portfolio that teachers would keep on some type of computer file, to a video portfolio of student work, and the concept which will be available in the next two to three years of writeable CD's." Barrett described the use of CD's, saying, "Teachers and students could select student work to scan in and record; and they could compress some examples of full- motion video--on CD or some other technology."

The technology is evolving rapidly. "Apple is coming out with its new Newton Personal Digital Assistant. It's designed to be about the size of a video cassette tape...[the] top comes up and reveals a screen, you write on the screen, it recognizes handwriting and converts that. So they're coming up with some storage devices the size of credit cards to go in those. There are a variety of types of possibility--CD's may not be the best thing. But it will be optical, rather than magnetic.

"When I presented this to DOE, they gave me a second project to look at a dissemination model. I designed a one-credit course, got equipment, and did conduct one in June, for the Chapter I program in Anchorage. [The course] gives teachers skills in the Grady Profile, compressing full-motion video...[shows them] what they could do with a computer." Barrett will summarize the student feedback for the November Assessment Summit prior to the Joint Partnerships Conference. Some local schools have requested a demonstration of Barrett's research.

In general, however, Barrett acknowledged that, though "I want to get more of this out. Everyone I show this to is excited," teachers have doubts about becoming involved. "What I heard from my teachers is that it's something else they are going to have to do on top of a busy schedule, an add on. It doesn't replace anything they are already doing. We're not talking about taking anything away, and I think that's a real concern."

After all of Barrett's work, the basic question of why use technology to support the portfolio process reduces to time and space management. "It gives the teachers a management tool that helps overcome some of the cumbersomeness that managing a portfolio in a file folder [becomes]. It gets to be a real space-consuming, time-consuming process, and you start to come across ethical issues. Who does it belong to...The ethical and ownership issue was brought up when I went to a session in June at The National Education Computing Conference, by Karen Sheingold of ETS [in a two-day workshop on educational computing and reform]. ETS is looking at developing new audiences for student work, using telecommunication to help teachers and students develop shared understanding of what constitutes good work. But combining technology and assessment brings up some ownership issues. When you take examples of student work, copy them into the computer, give [the work] back, you avoid that whole ownership issue.

"It really supports the whole language curriculum much better than you'd see in just a writing sample...because you can also put in spoken work. You have a lot more flexibility with that, ability to access, video clips,--it's much more efficient than trying to fast forward through video or audiotapes...The products available are really whole language based, and don't really support Math and Science, but there's no reason why the whole concept couldn't be expanded to Math and Science.

"I see it from the perspective of saving the teacher time, but some teachers don't see it from that perspective because they're still holding onto the old methods they had to use, they're not eliminating the things they did before.

"Really, the whole concept of portfolios is a way of facilitating the communication process, the social interaction between student and teacher; student, teacher and parent; as to what constitutes good work. So you have what technology hopes to use as a way of facilitating this communication process, so that by the time the social processes get into place the technology will be in place to support that."

Teacher time and the attitude changes necessary for incorporation of technology into the process of assessment aren't the only concerns Barrett's research has raised.

"I'm involved with the National Head Start Public School Transition project, as the Anchorage coordinator. There are 32 projects all over the country; Anchorage is one. It's a big study. I'm appalled at the measures they're using to assess student development-- The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, The Woodcock Johnson...do they know words, can they identify pictures...I was showing the Grady Profile [at a national meeting of project coordinators] and talking to them about how we could gather data, have students talk for a minute about a best friend or pet, get a sample of how they can speak, scan in how they can write...And their basic statement is 'you can't present that to Congress if you can't reduce to numbers and levels of significance.' It's very difficult to standardize on authentic measures. You can't compare a portfolio to other students. You have to be able to boil it down."

Appendix C
Names and Addresses

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Overview of Innovative Assessment Projects

- *Continue development of the portfolio system, and student-led parent conferences; expand into the area of Science.*

  Anchorage School District
  Susitna Elementary School
  Sonja Hawkins, Principal

- *Repeat the Susitna teacher-led course on portfolio development for both new Susitna staff and staff of Eagle River, Fairview, Ravenwood and Homestead Elementary Schools.*

  Anchorage School District
  Tom Straugh, Assessment and Evaluation

- *Develop "hands on" tubs containing all the equipment, supplies and instructions to test district Science process skills.*

  Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
  Badger Road Elementary
  Leslie Gordon, Teacher

- *Continue development of Birch Elementary primary-level portfolios, and the parent conferencing which has become a part of the portfolio process.*

  Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
  Birch Elementary
  Chris Williams, Principal, Ladd Elementary School (project year principal Birch Elementary)

- *Funds are being used to bring in a mathematics assessment consultant, Karen Higgins of the University of Oregon, in to work with teachers on alternative assessment grades 3-8.*

  Juneau Douglas School District
  Mendenhall River
  Lynn Williams, Mathematics Teacher Trainer

- *Continue development of the districtwide portfolio assessment by expanding into the second grade. Provide release time for teachers to participate in planning.*

  Juneau Douglas School District
  Annie Calkins, Curriculum Director

- *Investigate the way children think mathematically at the fifth and sixth grade levels, and develop appropriate assessment strategies.*

  Ketchikan Gateway Borough Schools
  Houghtaling Elementary
  Anne Germain, Teacher

- *Provide information to teachers in K-1 assessment practices; provide Kindergarten and first grade teachers the opportunity to confer and reflect about the information.*

  Kodiak Borough School District
  Robbie Ward, Director of Federal Programs

- *Provide training for district teachers in an effort to extend the existing K-1 portfolio assessment project to authentic assessment strategies for Math and Science in other grade levels.*

  Lower Yukon School District
  Donna Sherrouse, Director of Curriculum

- *Develop and model elementary Science performance tests to accompany the Full Option Science System (FOSS)*

  Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
  Cottonwood Creek Elementary School
  Chester Anderson, Principal

- *Develop portfolios containing evidence of competence in Math, Science, Language Arts and Social Studies, and a rubric for sharing this during student-led conferences.*

  Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
  Colony Middle School
  Mardene Collins, Linda Volkman, Cathy Walter and Ray DePriest
  Teacher Interdisciplinary Team

- *Funds provided hands on Science equipment and portfolio materials for students to use in recording their Science knowledge in a variety of ways.*

  Northwest Arctic School District
  Kotzebue Elementary
  Karl Kowalski, Teacher

- *Secondary Language Arts writing portfolio*

  Railbelt School District
  Kathleen Formella, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

- *Focus on mathematics "authentic" assessment at the K-2 level, and integrate this into the overall district effort to implement criterion-referenced testing. CRT's will be part of the portfolio system, as well as other methods being developed.*

  Southwest Region School District
  Janelle Cowan, Curriculum Coordinator
  Todd Overby, Education Specialist

- *Design a district-wide mathematics assessment which can be used at benchmark grades (3, 6, 8 and Transition Math/Algebra) and reported as the current Writing Assessment is reported, to staff and the public.*

  Kenai Peninsula Borough School District
  Paul Epperson, Director of Secondary Education

- *Research the current and emerging technologies that can be used to support and manage innovative assessment.*

  Helen Barrett
  University of Alaska Anchorage

"At First They Thought It Was An Animal We Were Going To Feed"
or
Developing Authentic Assessment

An Overview of Six Portfolio Assessment Projects in the State of Alaska

Overview report prepared by
Dr. Nancy Buell
Management Resources

with the cooperation and assistance of
Central Office Support Personnel and Teachers in the
Aleutians East Borough School District
Anchorage School District
Fairbanks NorthStar Borough School District
Juneau School District
Lower Yukon School District
Southwest Region School District

May 14, 1991

Comparison of Portfolio Projects

	Grade Level(s)		Audience (X = primary)			Selector		Content*						
	Elementary	Secondary	Parents	Next Teacher	Student	Teacher	Student	R	W	S	L	Sp	M	O
Fairbanks														
Birch Elementary	X		X	?		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lathrop High School		X			X	X	X		X					
Lower Yukon	K		X	X	X	X		X	X			X	X	
Aleutians East	K-7		X	X	X	X								
SouthWest Region	K-4		X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X	
Juneau	1		X	X		X		X	X					
Anchorage	K-6		X	X	X	X	X	X	X					X

*Contents: Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Spelling, Math, Other

Introduction

During 1989, the Alaska Department of Education offered districts seed money to begin looking at the development of alternative models of student assessment, particularly portfolio assessment. Six districts submitted proposals for use of such seed money and were funded--Anchorage, Aleutians East, Fairbanks, Juneau, Lower Yukon and Southwest. After a planning and development year during which the districts used their funds to bring small planning groups together to work out details and, in some cases, actually begin piloting portfolio assessment, all six were again given a small amount of funding to carry their projects into a pilot implementation phase.

There were no constraints on districts to follow a particular model. However, the Alaska Department of Education did disseminate some information and encouraged projects to communicate with one another. Teachers from the Anchorage project, particularly, conducted inservice and a credit course which was attended by some members of other projects. Some of the projects requested additional funding and received this in small amounts.

In late April and early May of 1991, a structured interview was developed and interviews were conducted with the central office contact person and at least one teacher from each project. The purposes of the interview process were to record the effects of the seed money, to provide an overview and comparison of the various projects, and to "celebrate" the work done by each district. These interviews are included in their full text, including the names of teachers involved, in Appendix B. Two districts offered survey information which they had collected from larger populations, and these are also appended and the data incorporated into the summary.

Project Descriptions

> ***"There was a big concern in our district that students weren't being evaluated in ways appropriate to the philosophy of the curriculum"***
> ***Marlys Henderson***

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Birch Elementary School, Lathrop High School

The Fairbanks North Star Borough School District has two separate portfolio projects. The elementary project, at Birch Elementary School, involves first and second grades. Portfolios reflect developmental stages in language arts (most prominently reading, writing and spelling, with one assessment of speaking in mid year) and mathematics, and include a social/emotional assessment. The portfolios are used for parent conferencing, and Birch teachers have worked very hard to "train" parents in use of this new assessment method. Students are involved in selecting the writing pieces which are included in the portfolio.

The secondary project at Lathrop High School includes freshmen students in a Basic Composition I class (semester), and junior students in an Advanced Composition class (year long). Four writing samples are collected (the student's choice with drafts, a response to a piece of literature, a creative piece of the student's choice, and a persuasive/ opinion piece) and a student letter of self-assessment is included. The purpose of the secondary project is to get students to be accountable to a different audience, and to create student responsibility for their own work. Portfolios are assessed by a team of readers, including district language arts specialists.

> ***"Just having served on the committee that developed it, I've really refined my understanding of what we're trying to teach. Criteria for rating really develops our awareness of what we're doing...We've done lots of sharing and talking"***
> ***Ann Agosti-Hackett, Russian Mission***

Lower Yukon School District
Russian Mission, Marshall, Kotlik, Emmonak, Hooper Bay, Mountain Village, Pilot Station, Pitkas Point, Scammon Bay and Sheldon Point Schools

The Lower Yukon School District portfolio assessment replaces both

the report card and standardized testing at the kindergarten level. Its purpose is to identify individual student growth patterns in the kindergarten curriculum, and to communicate those to site administrators, parents and the next year's teacher. Portfolios include a reading assessment and samples of student work in writing, spelling and mathematics. Portions of the portfolios are used for parent conferences, and at the end of the year the teacher weeds the portfolio and selects the most representative work to be passed on to the first grade teacher, who is the primary audience.

A portfolio committee composed kindergarten teachers from each site, plus one first grade teacher, has worked on the project over the past two years.

> ***"I do know that when I told them the story starter writing was going into the portfolio, the work was a lot better."***
> ***Shannon Wilde, King Cove***

Aleutians East Borough School District
King Cove and Sand Point Schools

The Aleutians East Borough School District is developing a writing portfolio for use K-7. Portfolios include one sample selected by the teacher, one selected by the student, and one sample the student can edit. Teachers meet once a quarter to choose a prompt for the writing sample, and students K-7 write for 20-30 minutes from this prompt. Samples were not scored, because most teachers have not yet been trained in scoring writing from a rubric. The involved teachers would like to include a math sample in the portfolio next year. The primary audience for the portfolio is the next year's teacher, although some teachers have used the portfolio as part of parent conferences

> ***"I shared it with the top level kids...I've asked them what competencies they wanted to really work on. I was amazed at the results. They have gone off and found pages and done extra homework, calling me on the phone. Their seeing their own progress is so valuable, and it's so obvious I can't believe I didn't do it before."***
>
> ***Kathy Schubeck, Aleknagik North Shore***

Southwest Region School District
Aleknagik North Shore School

Southwest Region School District is using a portfolio of student work to assess listening, speaking, reading, writing, numeration, problem solving, computation, measurement and (depending on grade level) geometry, based upon competency statements. This year grades K-4 were involved, and the district plans to expand involvement to eighth grade. A primary audience for the portfolio will be the next-year's teacher, who will be able to use it for diagnosis of student competency level. Teacher involvement this year was voluntary, with the district providing resources and helping teachers to get together. Next year will see a bigger "push" for involvement.

> ***"I think it gives you a really good picture of how children learn. You can see progress through the year. It's a daily thing you do with kids, not just a quarterly assessment like a report cart...It's a lot of things that teachers already do, just a little more formalized way of doing it."***
>
> ***Kathy Hanna, Auke Bay, Juneau***

Juneau Borough School District

Juneau is the only district among the projects to attempt to install portfolios districtwide. The portfolio has been piloted this year by all first grade teachers. The portfolio assesses reading attitudes, process and behaviors; writing attitudes and a writing sample; and development work is being done on assessing listening and speaking. Developmental reading and writing continuua assist teachers to identify student growth.

The district board has endorsed the notion of a four to five-year commitment to portfolios, adding a grade each year, plus training for

administrators. . Next year the process will be computerized, with a Macintosh for each teacher involved.

> ***"Using portfolios made the word, 'assessment,' valid for myself, parents and students. I think that after using these, I understand what this really is, and that it's ongoing."***
> ***Jan Flavel, Susitna, Anchorage***

Anchorage School District
Susitna Elementary School

Anchorage's Susitna Elementary School has an active Portfolio Committee, composed of the most involved teachers, including representatives from every grade level. This year there is a minimum expectation of the entire staff that everyone collect three writing samples--one taken at the beginning of the year, one at the end, and one that the student gets to choose.

The Portfolio Committee at Susitna began by assessing writing, but has as a primary focus this year building student self-esteem through the portfolio process. Individual teachers have elected to involve content areas other than writing. At every grade level, students have some involvement in the portfolio itself, and in some classes are actively involved in presenting the portfolio to their parents in a "celebration" of their progress. A "working portfolio" holds samples of student work throughout the year and is then weeded to become a permanent portfolio to pass along to the next teacher. Goals for next year include involving more teachers, and the ultimate goal is to replace report cards with this process.

Susitna teachers have shown leadership in presenting inservice on the topic of portfolio assessment and organizing a course which was attended by 35 teachers.

Why Portfolios?

Districts had markedly similar reasons for piloting portfolio assessment. Marlys Henderson, Fairbanks language arts specialist, capsulized what others said when she raised the concern that "students weren't being evaluated in ways appropriate to the philosophy of...developmental spelling, writing and whole language." The standardized test was frequently mentioned as an inappropriate device for assessing

process writing and whole or integrated language approaches. ("The ITBS doesn't show what students can do; it only shows if students can edit.")

According to Joyce Koppert in Lower Yukon, "Teachers were really frustrated with traditional methods for assessing" writing, whole language and Math Their Way. Ann Agosti-Hackett spoke for teachers when she said, "The whole purpose of portfolios would be so your assessment can match your program. Whole language, for instance." All districts mentioned the whole language approach as a reason for using the portfolio as an assessment device.

Three other noteworthy reasons were given. Anchorage teachers pointed out that when the portfolio approach was used, the "grade wasn't something the teacher did to you," but something which was "earned," and this was apparent to the student and the parent. Juneau Curriculum Director Annie Calkins identified the need for a longitudinal measure of individual growth beyond the standardized test as a motivating reason for development. And, finally, criticism of the report card as inadequate to reflect what students could actually do was mentioned in three cases.

Parent Reactions

Though the portfolio was not attempted with parents as the primary audience in all projects, all projects reported enthusiastic parent support when parents were in any way made aware of the portfolio. Mary Carolyn Ramsaur, at Birch Elementary in Fairbanks, said, "Parent response has been exceedingly positive. One hundred percent for all three conferences. Parents are very enthusiastic and extremely supportive of the process." The percentage "100%" for parent attendance at conferences involving the portfolio was mentioned by several teachers.

Several teachers, too, spoke of the necessity to "train parents" to understand the portfolio. Parents in bush as well as urban communities were receptive. According to Joyce Koppert, "What's been interesting is that parents are really receptive. Student examples of work help parents much more than grades." Kathy Schubeck, teacher at Aleknagik North Shore said, "The verdict is still out...[but] our parents have been really positive about it."

Juneau School District conducted a parent survey and received 147 responses. The survey showed that 78% of parents responding felt the portfolio gave the a clear evaluation of their child's reading and writing process. A total of 64% felt is was more helpful than the report card, and an additional 21% wanted both.

Anchorage teachers focused on celebration of student work through the parent conference, and had compiled examples of celebratory letters parents were asked to write to their child when the conference was over. "One little girl got letters from her entire family," reported one teacher. The committee said, "We had lots of good parent feedback. They sent in notes of support and asked intelligent questions. There was ...lots more parent involvement in the conference."

Student Involvement?

> ***"One little boy wanted to fondle every piece of paper [at his conference]: 'and look how I did this!'"***
> ***Cindy Murati, Susitna, Anchorage***

One point of variation among the projects was the degree of student involvement, which varied from the high involvement described in the Anchorage project to none, in some cases. Lathrop High School teachers BJ Craig and Kathy Alton reported a positive effect at high school level, where students not only selected one of the samples for inclusion but wrote cover letters of self-assessment. In year-long classes, teachers saw "tremendous growth" in the student's ability to assess his/her own writing. One parent reported, "This is the first time my child has ever come home and showed me work she has done in high school." Birch elementary students chose their journal sample, and their writing process piece for inclusion, and staff reported that the effect was "positive. We do go over the portfolio and show the children the growth," remarked Mary Carolyn Ramsaur.

Students were involved across the project in two ways, sometimes in both ways: they either actually selected samples of work for inclusion, or they had an opportunity to conference with the teacher using the portfolio, and to observe and comment on their own growth.

According to Ann Agosti-Hackett, students "every day...put their work into the writing folder. And they know when we do the one-to-one assessment what we're doing. They do enjoy it when [growth] is obvious."

Some teachers, however, were concerned about how very young children and those "not doing well" can be involved in the process. Shannon Wilde, at King Cove School, said, "I've been reluctant to [share portfolios with students] because I didn't know how student who are not doing well would respond. I shared it with the top level kids...I've asked

them what competencies they wanted to really work on. I was amazed at the results...Their seeing their own progress is so valuable, and it's so obvious I can't believe I didn't do it before."

Among the Juneau teachers, there were those who were concerned that students "weren't developmentally ready" by first grade to be involved in their portfolios. According to Annie Calkins, "one teacher has done this, and kids generated some good stuff." She said that self-reflective letters would definitely be part of the portfolios next year. Juneau teacher Kathy Hanna, however, makes students aware of portfolios now. She says, "They know that's where they put writing samples, and I do a running record of reading once a quarter, and they know when I do that...I put in a copy of every piece of their computer writing and I do the selecting...The effect is positive...especially when they have a chance to look at samples of their writing at the beginning of the year and samples now. It's obvious that they're really delighted with what they've learned. The little faces light up: wow, look what I can do now."

Anchorage teachers acknowledged there was a range of student reaction to being involved in the parent conference: "some felt good, some strange." However, teachers were careful to coach students and parents to view the conference as a "celebration" of student growth, and kindergarten students were given an option to participate. According to Carolyn Crosby, "Three opted not to do it. After the first kids came back excited, one opted in. Child choice was a feature." Perhaps the most eloquent testimony for student involvement in the conference came from Jan Flavel at Susitna, who said, "Had I not been listening to them explain, I would not have known how much they had learned." The Anchorage project also showed how children could become more involved at each successive grade level. At the first grade, the teacher asked the children, "What can we do in a conference that would show your parent how you learn?" At the sixth grade level, students were randomly assigned to cooperative learning groups which developed agendas, practiced speaking before the group, critiqued one another's speeches, and provided debriefing after the conference had taken place. They continued to be involved with helping one another monitor action plans for their academic goals throughout the year. All levels of children were involved, including Resource children, who showed that they were able to "explain their own problems: This is an area I know I really need to work on." According to the committee, "The things in the portfolio showed progress, and everyone makes it."

What Has Been Learned

> *"Just having served on the committee that developed it--I've really refined my understanding of what we're trying to teach."* ***Ann Agosti-Hackett, Russian Mission***

In response to the interview question, "What have you learned that you would like to share with other educators," no one was without a definite answer.

The answers were somewhat idiosyncratic, but two or three consistent threads emerged. First, a real benefit of each project was having the time to work with other professionals to develop standards for the portfolio. This was repeatedly mentioned. Second, portfolios develop professional pride and consciousness of "what we're trying to do." They assess more accurately, and give the teacher a sense that he or she can defend the grade given to students, or, more importantly, show accurately to any audience what students have learned. The only consistent negative which emerges is that portfolios take time. They take time in the classroom, which distresses some teachers. They take time to develop. They take time to keep current. But, overwhelmingly, the response is that they are worth it--even in Juneau, the only project where teachers did not have a choice of whether to participate.

A sampling of the responses are included here to give a flavor of the learning which took place. All responses are included in the Appendices B, D, E, and F.

<u>What I Have Learned...</u>

- "Every portfolio is different, based on what the teacher is doing."
- "Portfolios are a more accurate way of assessing."
- "Working with other staff member helps me to come to terms with data."
- "Principal support is necessary."
- "There is pride as you progress"
- "Many times teachers are isolated. A real bond has developed among these kindergarten teachers who have met many times this year. The bond and sharing goes on because of the project."

- "It needs to come from the teachers themselves; it can't be imposed."
- "Teachers need to become involved, have buy in...teachers are eager to work on this because they know that their input is valued."
- "Just having served on the committee that developed it--I've really refined my understanding of what we're trying to teach."
- "There needs to be common ground on what's being taught."
- "The most important thing is that teachers do see the need for a different assessment than the usual standardized testing."
- "Portfolios help the report card so much."
- "The idea that assessment is much more than paper-pencil, multiple choice tests, and our students can show many successes in areas that normally we don't assess and compare and evaluate...We sometimes get the impression that we do a lousy job based on standardized test scores, and I think that...people will have positive feelings toward assessment and students will have feelings of success, because they don't have success on standardized tests. Plus you have better communication with parents."
- "It's growing with me, it's evolving with me, and as it evolves, I'm finding ways to use it more effectively...writing is probably the main one."
- "A couple of negatives. It's incredibly time consuming. It is a lot more work for the teacher; it is not less work."
- "I have a real concern for consistency across the district--standards. We really all need to get more understanding of what the 'emergent reader' is, for example, get into the nitty gritty content of the reading process, particularly."
- "I think it gives you a really good picture of how children learn. You can see progress through the year. It's a daily thing you do with kids. Not just a quarterly assessment like a report card. It's something you think about each time you work with a kid--the notetaking you do each time. It's a lot of things that teachers already do, just a little more formalized way of doing it."
- "Using it during conferences gave me confidence, supported my professionalism."
- "Using portfolios has made the word, 'assessment,' valid for myself, parents and students."

- "I think all of us probably would echo that. [I feel best about] having kindergartners going out of kindergarten being excited about learning and their goals, with very good self-esteem... going into first grade turned on about themselves."
- "In 19 years of teaching, it's been my best year yet...a prized experience. The portfolio is a tool to help children learn to set goals and evaluate whether they meet those goals."
- "The portfolio, originally, was for showing to parents. But getting the students to the point of making the presentation was marvelous....They made successful presentations, with visual aids, an agenda. They were proud of themselves."
- "We've seen a lot of ownership. The vocabulary changed from 'what you gave me,' to 'what I earned.'"
- "The kids were really able to see their progress. They were very specific in their goals."
- "We have really learned from each other. It's crucial to have support from our principal."
- "This has all of the elements of a student-at-risk program. The kids were becoming more responsible for learning. There was a behavior change in the kids. They were beginning to realize that it's their learning."

The Question of Standards

Obviously, whether it is an individual teacher or a group of teachers developing a portfolio assessment system, the question of what standards one uses to assess student growth comes rapidly behind the question of which areas to assess. In actuality, it may circle the question--areas where standards have not been well articulated may originally have been thought to be important parts of the portfolio and may subsequently be rejected because of the lack of a rubric, a continuum, or checklist to use in charting student progress. Districts varied, from having attacked this area thoroughly, to not assessing student work in the portfolio at all because of the lack of such instruments or clarity.

The most common set of standards was a writing rubric, showing the compatibility of the portfolio with the writing process and reinforcing the degree to which this innovation in writing instruction has been installed in Alaska. Other devices used across the projects were checklists, continuua in reading and writing, competencies, student composites which were commercially acquired, and teacher-generated

checklists. Teachers were quick to point out areas where such guidelines in whatever form, did not yet exist, and how time consuming they were to develop. In two districts, the lack of the development of such guidelines was seen as a major problem with the ability to use the portfolio in, for instance, listening and speaking.

Emergent Issues

Viewed across projects, some issues plainly emerged which might benefit from illumination in a professional forum, or might profitably be the focus of additional dedicated funding for classroom research.

Involvement of Very Young or Low Achieving Children

Guidelines for student involvement would apparently be beneficial to most teachers who are using the portfolio approach with kindergarten and first grade children. It is apparent, looking across projects, that some teachers have not only used them successfully, they have found that children even at the kindergarten level are reinforced and delighted by viewing their own progress in such a fashion. It is equally apparent that children must learn about the portfolio just as they must learn about any method of assessment, if they are to have a positive attitude about it. As one Susitna (Anchorage) Elementary First Grade Teacher said, "At first they thought it was an animal we were going to feed."

Because the nonverbal messages from the teacher are read by the children, teacher comfort with using the portfolio with very young children may be a prerequisite to effective student involvement. Teachers across projects were most reinforced by in-depth discussions of technique with other teachers, and especially where new ground was being broken. Forums where teachers can talk to teachers who have had success with the portfolio would apparently be beneficial to all. This may be especially important for village teachers, who may not have a colleague at all, let alone one at the same grade level. Rural project teachers repeatedly mentioned how much they appreciated simply being able to get together to discuss what they were doing.

Teachers who are concerned about damaging student self-esteem when using the portfolio with children who are not doing well academically may need more than such forums. Since "the portfolio shows progress, and everyone makes it," as one teacher observed, techniques of presentation, opportunities to practice giving low-achieving children

developmentally appropriate feedback, and research summaries of successful projects which involve all children might be useful to share with all teachers attempting to use portfolios. Again, the Susitna experience, which included use of portfolios presented to parents by special needs children, is a powerful incentive to support teacher use of at least limited portfolios with all children.

A teacher concerned about letting any child know or see his or her progress needs the support and encouragement of other professionals.

Use of Methods Other Than "Paper" Products

At least three projects mentioned the desire to use audiotapes, videotapes, or some other method of including student work in the portfolio other than those recorded on paper. Certainly the building examples of authentic assessment nationwide emphasize performance, and the term "portfolio" may need to be seen more metaphorically than it is currently construed by some teachers. This would seem to be an important area for future classroom-based research.

Identifying Expectations and Standards

Several projects expressed concern that teachers should be "consistent" across districts in their expectations for students, and that standards should be set for assessment--in the form of developmental continuua, or rubrics for writing assessment, or competencies. Two districts mentioned the importance of teachers working with the same program, such as Math Their Way, or The Wright Group, so that there would be a common language for assessment, and common expectations for student performance.

Districts who had trained writing process teachers, a selected rubric and a developmental reading continuum showed a smoother conversion to using the portfolio to assess student growth.

It is apparent that where peformance or developmental standards existed, teachers felt more confident in showing both students and parents what was included in the portfolio. The relative strengths and weaknesses of uniform data collection would probably be beneficial to discuss both within districts and across projects.

The Time It Takes...

Especially in Juneau, where all first grade teachers were surveyed, but also in several instances in other projects, teachers raised the concern that the process was very time consuming, and that in some cases, classroom management (for instance, what should the other children be doing while the teacher is conferencing with a child) was raised as an issue.

The ripple effect on classroom and time management is a documented phenomenon with any school change effort. It may be appropriate to examine strategies for assisting teachers to overcome the initial hurdle of incorporating portfolios into their everyday routine with children. Such strategies as computerizing developmental checklists, item banks, cooperative learning groups, and so forth, might be shared by projects or individual teachers--for instance on videotape--to assist others.

What Happens to the Portfolio?

Two projects raised the concern that students and parents will come to expect the portfolio system, and that children may move to other districts, go forward to schools which are not using the portfolio, or, simply, go to another teacher who is not using this method. Examining questions such as whether it is necessary for a district to make a long range commitment, whether teachers should be compelled to use such assessment (as opposed to volunteering), and whether it matters if a child has a portfolio one year and not the next might profitably be discussed by the Curriculum Cabinet or some other similar, representative body.

Looking At What We Expect of Children

A perhaps unanticipated side benefit of the project has been the necessity for teachers to really look at not only what they expect of children, but how it could be demonstrated what a child has learned. This is definitely a step for participating teachers toward authentic work and authentic assessment, and involves teachers in the crucial "reflective" stage so much of the literature on teacher training now cites as necessary for professional growth. Districts and teachers involved have found that the written "curriculum" is only a general guide--they must get to a very great level of specificity in order to design an appropriate portfolio, and

this forces the reflection, and, in many cases, negotiation with other teachers, necessary to identify the essence of what they are teaching and assessing.

Other Subjects, Other Grades...

The most common content of the portfolio was student writing. Many districts have staff trained in the writing process, and as one teacher put it, "Teachers keep writing folders anyway, so it lent itself." The second most common content of the portfolio was a reading assessment of some sort, with several projects including lists of books children had read to let both parents and teachers know reading level and student interests.

Since there was only one high school project, and this project only assessed writing, it could possibly be concluded that writing is the most natural place for a district, at any grade level, to begin using the portfolio assessment method. However, nationally, secondary projects have developed with great success, and in subject areas other than writing. Dissemination of information about high school projects, and perhaps seed money targeted specifically at the secondary level, might be a beneficial "next stage" of development in Alaska.

A review of the literature on exemplary projects nationally shows that language arts is in the vanguard in portfolio assessment at this time. However, following closely are vocational education, fine arts, and other performance based curricula--where, in fact, years ago, the whole portfolio movement began. Providing videotapes or other information collected from successful projects using portfolios a) at the secondary level and/or b) in other than language arts to interested districts might provide just the stimulus needed to expand authentic assessment throughout the state.

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Appendix A

Interview Instrument

Central Office Support Staff

1. Describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your project. *(Alternate form/paraphrase: Tell me about what you're doing with portfolio assessment in your district, just a brief overview.)*

2. What content is being assessed in this fashion?

3. Did you set standards in advance for levels of performance?

4. How did you decide to assess this particular content in this fashion? *(Alternate form/paraphrase: Why did you choose this content to assess by the portfolio method?)*

5. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

6. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

Interview Instrument
Teacher

1. I've discovered that the way the DOE and the district level person describe your project are a little different. How would *you* describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your classroom? *(Alternate form/paraphrase: Tell me about what you're doing with portfolio assessment in your classroom, just a brief overview.)*

2. Why did you decide to try assessing [this particular content] *(substitute the specifics given in question one to personalize)* in this way?

3. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

4. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

Appendix B

District/Project Interviews

Data is reported as close to the actual words as possible, and in the first person singular and plural, as the respondent(s) answered during the interview.

There has been occasional, discreet and intentionally minimal editing for grammar and syntax. Some ideas have been repositioned when they were suggested in response to one question but actually answered another, but responses are otherwise entirely intact.

No stylistic editing has been done. Responses can be assumed to use the actual wording of the respondent, but quotations are seldom used unless the desire of the interviewer is to use unconventional wording and to make it clear it is the exact wording offered by the respondent. Question 6 is recorded exactly as stated, and quotations are used.

When the respondent offered information which went beyond a question, and beyond the aggregate of questions, this was recorded at the point at which the respondent offered the information. The assumption of the interviewer was that the respondent was offering something which, in his or her global view, was related to the question being asked.

All interviews were conducted by telephone, except that with Susitna Elementary Staff, and recorded on the computer as the respondent spoke. The interviewer attended one and one-half hours of the Susitna Elementary staff planning group's meeting on May 3, and took verbatim information in shorthand.

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District, Jim Villano and Marlys Henderson, central office Language Arts Specialists (452-2000)

1. Describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your project.

This is a two-part project; the parts have different purposes, though both look at student growth and development in the respective grade levels.

The secondary project is specific to writing. It documents the work students are doing at the present time. Teachers involved are Chuck Prejean, BJ Craig, and Kathy Alton.

The [Lathrop High School] portfolio allows students to be accountable to different audiences, encourages them to do their best, gives the teacher a picture of the students and their writing program. All samples have been graded already, but students have a role in putting together what they think is their best work, which is another form of self-assessment.

The primary project is used for reporting to parents of first graders. The portfolio enhances the report card and gives parents much more information than they were previously given during parent conferences. We requested some extra money to have an extra week of parent conferences. Teachers involved are Mary Carolyn Ramsaur (first grade), Bonnie Wallace (second grade), Diane Hansen (first grade), Harriet Klann (second grade) and Chris Williams, principal. Other teachers in the district are experimenting with portfolios, following a class taught by Central Office staff. For instance, Terri Austin is using portfolios to conduct student/parent conferences with sixth graders.

The primary project assesses integrated language arts--reading, writing, speaking and listening. We just added math at the last reporting period. We also added social behaviors. We felt that language arts wasn't a complete picture.

2. What content is being assessed in this fashion?

At the secondary level, only writing. In the Lathrop portfolio, one piece is the author's choice, and this one must have all drafts. Without drafts, the portfolio "fails," until all of the drafts are in. Samples are limited to 500 words. One piece is writing in response to a piece of literature. One piece is a creative piece of the student's choice. That was for the first semester (three pieces only). The second semester added a personal opinion paper--a persuasive piece. A fifth piece was a cover letter --metacognition or self-assessment. Students did not get credit for doing the portfolio unless they met all of the criteria. The project involves freshmen [Basic Comp I] and juniors [Advanced Composition]. Writing was assessed using the Beaverton Analytical Model [used in Oregon]. It was modified a bit for the creative piece. The purpose was to be accountable to a different audience, generate student responsibility for assessing and collecting their own work, meeting deadlines, making a good presentation of themselves. It was a means for the teachers to assess their program, including standards, and student performance or achievement in the curriculum, across different ability groups and grade levels. They wanted

students to be aware of the writing process--drafting, editing, etc., and that's why they added the draft requirement in the portfolio, for instance.

At the primary level, the project assesses language arts as correlated with the district curriculum. The developmental stages of reading have been identified, with different traits associated with those stages being described in the curriculum guide. Within developmental writing they have separate pieces. They xerox a journal entry (one per quarter), include a process piece of writing, a spelling sample that shows growth and development (collected three times per year on the same test). They include tools for conferencing with students--observation sheets with anecdotal information about students taken during a reading conference and a writing conference. In the reading conference, for instance, the student reads a book of his/her choice, and the teacher looks for certain things. This is summative each quarter. The writing assessment is holistic for the first semester and analytical for the second.

3. Did you set standards in advance for levels of performance?

We used the modified Beaverton model for writing assessment, and we also follow the method the state has used, including the interrater reliability process. For the primary, we looked at the developmentally appropriate stages as set out by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the Portland [school district] descriptions, and recommendations of Marie Clay [President of IRA, specialist in primary literacy]. These standards are laid out on pages within the portfolio.

A good deal of time was spent with the teachers talking among themselves, looking at the curriculum, and talking about what they wanted. Most of the grant money was spent on time for the teachers to get together and hash this out.

4. How did you decide to assess this particular content in this fashion?

There was a big concern in our district that students weren't being evaluated in ways appropriate to the philosophy of the curriculum--where it was aligned to developmental spelling, developmental writing at the primary level, for instance. This answered a need for teachers for child-centered evaluation, evaluation which increases child self-esteem. It is an emphasis on what the child can do, rather than comparing the child to the norm. It celebrates children and what they can do.

At the secondary level, it balances creative, process, response to literature--not just one type of writing. It evaluates student mastery of conventions, use of English grammar. But the major thing to emphasize is that the ITBS doesn't show what students can do; it only shows if students can edit.

5. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

The first graders are not aware. The high school students are definitely aware.

This has caused a positive effect at the high school level. The cover letters from students are a self-assessment. Teachers have seen tremendous growth in the student's ability to assess his/her own writing if they've been with the same teacher throughout the year. Students who started at the beginning of the year and are now in their second semester see it as a celebration of their writing. The personal voice in the cover letters shows this. One parent said, "this is the first time my child has ever come home and showed me work she has done in high school."

6. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

Jim Villano - "Every portfolio is different; there is no one packaged portfolio that everyone should follow. Decide on a purpose, then find contents that will achieve that purpose, and come up with [your] own way of assessing the contents of the portfolio based upon [your] purpose--grade level, intent, etc. Teachers, support for them to go through the process, is critical."

Marlys Henderson - "It provides us with a more accurate, appropriate and authentic picture of what a student is capable of doing or is doing. It is more inclusive, and provides not just one little picture, but a broader picture of what a student is currently doing."

Some things to explore in the future are parent conferences and involvement, and student presentation of the portfolio to the parents. Even at the high school, more parent involvement is needed. In our district we have student/parent conferences with the portfolio, but not with this pilot project, in three classrooms. There's lots of interest. We have 35 teachers who have just finished a class in portfolio assessment and there's a lot of enthusiasm for it right now. It's been hardest to convince administrators of its value, but once they see its value, they become advocates for it. The upper administration is mostly concerned about the ITBS, but as a way of telling what a student can do, and getting information to parents, there's a lot of room for exploring. A lot of what we did at Birch [for example] was training with parents.

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Birch Elementary School, Mary Carolyn Ramsaur, First Grade Teacher
(356-1435)
[Note: see also Appendix D for conversations between CO staff and Birch teachers, and Appendix E for conversations between CO staff and Lathrop teachers.]

1. I've discovered that the way the DOE and the district level person describe your project are a little different. How would *you* describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your classroom?

We are doing first and second grade. Emphasis is on early childhood and developmentally appropriate practices in the language arts. Three times, we meet with the parents--30 minutes in November, January and April--this is double the amount of time we normally have. We usually have 15 minutes, and we added January.

We have a reading recording sheet we use at second grade. It comes from the primary language record book ordered from Heinemann Publishing --the English portfolio type of book for [British] Infant Schools. For the first grade we are following a similar format, using sheets I made up. Then we also have, from Portland [Public Schools], the transfer to transfer sheet that lists the stages for reading, writing and spelling. I hilited for the parents the stage their child is at in reading.

We do a journal sample from the daily journal three times a year, a process writing piece twice a year (draft to final copy, with teacher notes and assessment) to go along with the writing recording sheet. We do a first grade rubric that's been developed by our district, and we do a prompt in the fall and one in the spring. The second grade does a modified Beaverton, and that is assessed by a whole team schoolwide.

Then we have a developmental spelling list which we assess three times a year, and that's in current literature--we just choose our own 20 words. We have an oral language form, found in the language record book. We only need to do that in January, because we feel we don't need to do it three times a year. By the middle of January we have a good picture of the child.

Then in January we do a social-emotional checklist developed by the Connecticut State Department of Education, and included in their Kindergarten curriculum guide.

At the end of the year, we do an end of the year narrative on each child. We list strengths, areas to be strengthened, and then at the bottom we put suggestions. A copy goes to the parent and a copy to next year's teacher. In the portfolio itself, we have a philosophy statement, which tells what the portfolio is [so it includes a nice picture, philosophy statement, forms]--that's hands on stuff.

2. Why did you decide to try assessing in this way?

Our emphasis with early childhood, for the fall and January session, is to train the parents--train and educate them. The first grade conferences have a precise format. In second grade we don't do it exactly the same. In the fall, we explain the reading stages, then we explain developmental spelling, highlight and show parents where the child is currently, and on the back we make recommendations for the stage the child is at. We got this idea from Portland [Public Schools], from one of their curriculum books. We concentrate on reading and spelling. Then in January we concentrate on the writing process. We have a sheet and we list the process and quickly explain from pre-write to final copy the stages. On the back there are the six analytical traits that are found in the Beaverton model. It has been adopted statewide in Oregon.

As a school, we have modified the terminology for primary, and we correlate those traits. In second grade we tell parents about the six areas; we tell parents we are also coming with literature and classroom writing experiences.

In the Spring we just go through the whole portfolio to see growth. We want students to be consumers of literature. What we do with parents, each time we give them their child's list of first to third grade books, is to show where the child is reading, and the kinds of books parents could check out or purchase.

3. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

Students choose what goes into the journal, and they choose their writing piece that goes in. The effect is positive. We do go over the portfolio and show the children the growth. This is ongoing, and we have done this individually. We need to build this in--we are still working on more student input. For next year, we're working on having the student more involved.

4. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"Parent response has been exceedingly positive. One hundred percent for all three conferences. Parents are very enthusiastic and extremely supportive of the process. The number of parents have said to me that theory has changed so much since they were in school, the one-to-one time showing their child's growth in developmental stages is extremely important to them.

"Working with other staff members is wonderful. We've had to work things out and we've had to compromise. We've had to come to terms on what the data was and lots of compromising...all learned from that. Our principal--we couldn't do any of it had she not been behind it. We had prep time and leave time."

Lower Yukon School District, Joyce Koppert, Curriculum Director (591-2411)

1. Describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your project.

We have eleven sites, and nine are participating. Teachers involved are Ann Agosti-Hackett at Russian Mission--she's part of the committee as well as Annie Beck at Marshall and Janet Johnson at Kotlik. Other teachers are Maxine Hendrickson at Emmonak, Natalie McBrayer and Laquita Lee at Hooper Bay, Elaine Hyatt at Mountain Village, Sandy Olson at Pilot Station, Colleen Kroenke at Pitkas Point, Elizbeth Kasayuli at Scammon Bay and Okalena Morgan at Sheldon Point. Annie Beck is not a kindergarten teacher, she teaches first grade. As we move the program along we will include the first grade teachers.

This is an ongoing student assessment program that replaces current tools [report cards and ITBS]. Its purpose is to verify individual growth patterns within developmentally appropriate kindergarten curriculum, and communicate with administrators of the site, and parents, and also with the teacher receiving the portfolio next year.

We have folders on each student. We're working on reading assessment, using the different stages of pre-independent, self -conceptualizing, bridging. We look at the continuum, using samples of student work, teacher observations, and teacher comments based on their observations. We are using different folders, with several examples of student work in all areas. Teachers go through all of these, then, and select for the "primary performance assessment portfolio" the most representative to be passed on to the first grade teacher at the end of the year, and to be shown to the parent. Teachers have met with parents during the year, and what's been interesting is that parents are really receptive. Student examples of work help parents much more than grades.

2. What content is being assessed in this fashion?

Language arts, writing, developmental spelling, reading; and mathematics. We used the district curriculum guide for grades K-2 and teachers have been looking at that in relation to how they are developing the portfolio. What's in the portfolio follows the curriculum. We are moving towards outcome-based education, and the committee will be in a good position to work on the outcomes.

This is a year of strategic planning for the district. Action teams have been meeting to work on exit outcomes--this is all a part of aligning our curriculum. When we first started looking at the primary we had several meetings with kindergarten teachers. This has been a real learning experience for us throughout the year. We've learned a lot from it.

3. Did you set standards in advance for levels of performance?

This has evolved during the year as we've been meeting. We did not, at first, anticipate having most of the teachers wanting to do this. All but one teacher wanted to be involved. The teachers have fed back to me; it has

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emerged from the teachers. A Portfolio Committee [see above] has been working at this over the last two years.

4. How did you decide to assess this particular content in this fashion?

We have been moving the teachers toward literacy centers and work stations. We've been using Robin Lindsley's videos on whole language, the Wright Group, Math Their Way. Teachers were really frustrated with traditional methods of assessing these. Teachers are really teaching teachers with the portfolio.

5. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way?
If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

We've talked about doing this. Teachers are dealing with this. At the Kindergarten level, it's more teacher selected. Teachers don't feel that the children have the skills to be able to look at something and critique it. The teachers feel it's coming as they move along. Teachers are eliciting from the children why they like a particular paper or drawing and talking with them. We see this whole project as evolving--it's a beginning year. We want to develop audiotapes and videotapes to do more than assess by paper and pencil. The more kinds of information and feelings, the better. But at this point the contents are pretty much teacher selected.

6. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"Many times teachers are isolated. A real bond has developed among these Kindergarten teachers who have met many times this year. The bond and sharing goes on because of the project...One recommendation: adopt the Wright Group, because at this point there's no official program...One thing we've learned: it needs to come from the teachers themselves; it can't be imposed. Teachers need to become involved, have buy in. We have that. They have bought into this because they have been a part of it from the outset. I feel there's a lot of work that went into it, lots of time; teachers are eager to work on this because they know that their input is valued."

Lower Yukon School District
Russian Mission School, Ann Agosti-Hackett, Kindergarten/First Grade Teacher (584-5414)

1. I've discovered that the way the DOE and the district level person describe your project are a little different. How would *you* describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your classroom?

We're using it to assess language arts -reading and writing--and math, using work samples. We have a writing checklist for observation and rating of work samples. Both classroom observation and the work sample rating goes into the checklist. We're working on a reading checklist, and having some difficulty conceptualizing that. A quarterly summary, to replace report cards, goes into the portfolio. It lists a few skill areas--we don't want to emphasize isolated skills--'knows so many consonant sounds, knows so many lower and upper case letters,' colors, one vocabulary area. We have developed our own writing, reading and spelling stages, and we mark along the continuum where they are. We have a developmental spelling assessment we've borrowed and adapted. The district has used Math Their Way, and we adopted the student composite, which is a set of assessments you do one-to-one with the student. We're using those and a few of our own for manipulative and concept-based math. It's kind of a composite for math.

The primary audience is intended to be the next teacher. The parent doesn't see the whole portfolio. We refer to the work samples or the developmental spelling assessment, and quarterly summaries, for the parents. We use the work samples with the students to a certain extent, showing the student how he or she has grown.

2. Why did you decide to try assessing in this way?

The whole purpose of portfolios would be so your assessment can match your program. Whole language, for instance--the portfolio is a better method [for assessing this].

3. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

Yes, they know they have one. They have a writing folder, and every day they put their work into the writing folder. And they know when we do the one-to-one assessment what we're doing. We're talking about perhaps using that portion some more. Some teachers use it more. Kindergartners aren't real self-reflective, but they do enjoy it when it's really obvious--'Oh, wow, look at the beginning of the year this is how you thought you wrote letters, and now...' [Is the effect positive or negative?] ***Oh, positive.***

4. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share

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with other educators?

"Just having served on the committee that developed it--I've really refined my understanding of what we're trying to teach--criteria for rating really develops our awareness of what we're doing. The district's really got to have--or teachers have to be using--similar programs. Teachers can approach [the same thing] differently, and that's been a kind of a problem area. You want to give teachers freedom, but it kind of depends upon common ground. Process writing, invented spelling--if you have a writing checklist based on those...if you're not doing that, you're perplexed when you look at the checklist.

"It's really positive that the district has been willing to pay for Kindergarten teachers to get together. We've done lots of sharing and talking to each other, so that we've reached a lot of common ground of what we're going to be teaching and how we're going to go about doing it. Pretty much everyone's gone with Math Their Way."

Aleutians East Borough School District, Virginia Kendall, Curriculum Director (383-5222)

1. Describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your project.

We're in the process of developing a language arts portfolio for use K-6--we're actually doing it--deciding what kind of things need to go into the portfolio.

2. What content is being assessed in this fashion?

This year, writing.

3. Did you set standards in advance for levels of performance?

I don't think they have developed any rubric. That is one of the things which concerns me.

4. How did you decide to assess this content in this fashion?

We had a grant written at the Central Office level. The Language Arts Committee and the teachers as a whole this year, as they started to implement whole language, felt they needed a different kind of assessment. People have been trained in giving the assessment workshop that the state put on this fall. They have been sharing it with parents and discussing it among themselves.

5. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

Students will be involved at the end of the year. There has been some input in what stays to pass along to the next teacher. Up to this point they have not been.

6. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"The most important thing is that teachers do see the need for a different assessment than the usual standardized testing assessment. Some problem...is that what used to be a very subjective type of thing to them--a piece of writing, intuition, or years of experience without being focused in --what they did informally and without a lot of awareness is now 'fussing' at them a little bit. They need to be objective, develop guidelines, guidelines for skill acquisition. Next year we're right at the appropriate stage to get that developed in a meaningful manner."

Aleutians East Borough School District
King Cove School, Shannon Wilde, Second Grade Teacher (497-2488)

1. I've discovered that the way the DOE and the district level person describe your project are a little different. How would *you* describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your classroom?

We started off last year with me in charge, met together and decided what we wanted to put in our portfolios for the first year writing sample: one teacher choice [writing], one student choice and one choice the student could edit. We met once a quarter to choose a sentence starter [prompt for the writing sample], and each student in K-7 wrote for 20-30 minutes on the same sentence starter, with invented spelling. [One story starter was selected for first quarter, and another for the next quarter, and the improvement shown over the two.] That went into the portfolio, along with one that the student chooses to put in, and one the teacher puts in.

I haven't scored them at all, just put them in the folder for a sample. Most of us haven't had any training in scoring.

The math is on hold for what we go with until next year. In the Spring, we were going to put in a math sample--a math time test or checklist for math skills. When we came to school this year, we chose to do math because the math curriculum meeting was going to review the whole math series. It came down to it that the meeting was in the spring, so we haven't put any math in this year.

[The audience for the portfolio is the next year's teacher.] We met last spring and I told teacher to hand portfolios to the next year's teachers. It worked out okay, but I...[, personally,]...didn't get portfolios for kids last year because they got dumped. In my parent/teacher conference, I pulled out the portfolio...using them as a parent reference.

2. Why did you decide to try assessing in this way?
[Never clearly answered. See question #1 and #4.]

3. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

They don't understand that it's assessment. They saw the portfolio, and know that it would go along with them, and that in the sixth trade they can take it home, as a diary of their progress. I'm not sure--maybe my class is too young to understand that. [A positive or negative effect seen?] ***I don't think so. It's still too new for them, or maybe we haven't placed enough emphasis on it. I do know that when I told them the story starter writing was going in the portfolio the work was a lot better.***

4. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the

most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"To tell you the truth, I want to learn more about it. I see that Dr. Straugh is going to be teaching a couple of classes. I flew out to Anchorage to take a trainer of trainers class--it was way over my head. Instead of becoming a trainer, I need to take more classes on the rubrics and how to assess writing. Portfolios help the report card so much. I feel our school's report care is really weak. We want to actually...as far as reading...put in cassette samples. The biggest part is getting ourselves into just doing it."

Southwest Region School District, Janelle Cowan, Curriculum Director (842-5288)

1. Describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your project.

We have created competency statements, or objectives, for Language Arts and Mathematics, K-8, and in conjunction with competency statements, we are also creating student portfolios as a means of assessment. Three teachers who have been key members of the district team and are helping me to redesign objectives at Kathy Schubeck, Debbie Moras and Carole Johnson at Aleknagik North Shore.

2. What content is being assessed in this fashion?

Listening, speaking, reading, writing; numeration, problem solving, computation, measurement and, depending on the grade level, some geometry.

3. Did you set some standards in advance for levels of performance?

We're in the process of doing this. It's developing. We're furthest along in writing. We have a much better handle on what a student profile looks like because of the analytical assessment.

4. How did you decide to assess this content in this fashion?

With the help of a team of teachers. John Anntonen, who was our superintendent last year, helped to determine what he thought should be in the content areas--Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing among them. We looked at textbooks and areas tested on the CAT and ITBS, to tell us if we ere on target for what norm-referenced tests felt was important at different grade levels. Listening isn't necessarily tested, but is certainly important. Teachers felt it was important. Speaking was not an area, but teaching staff felt it was important. Also it was very important that we chose teachers from across the district with different strengths of content area. We had different teachers over a three-year period, because of turnover. But that has been part of the whole buy in, that this is important. We basically have only met face-to-face once or twice a year. We have gotten lots done by sending drafts back and forth and presenting at staff or school board meetings, and getting feedback from them. Also we've used audioconference.

5. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

We're just in the first year of the implementation at K-4 level. There's not yet a great push to make sure it's implemented. We've put it into the teacher's hands. Next year there will be a big push for more training and implementation. No students are involved yet. We have a direction to teachers to allow student self-selected writing samples or activities. Based on what the objectives are, we haven't focused on that in math, but there is a portion of each portfolio that says, "student self-selected work, include in

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portfolio." Because of the reading I've done I know it's important for students to be able to evaluate their own progress, see their own growth and see their own assessment. Under problem solving, you can have students write their own word problems and make their own picture graphs--it would lend itself to students being proud of their own work.

6. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"The idea that assessment is much more than paper-pencil, multiple choice tests, and our students can show many successes in areas that normally we don't assess and compare and evaluate. That will be a real plus, a real positive. We sometimes get the impression that we do a lousy job based on standardized test scores, and I think that...people will have positive feelings toward assessment and students will have feelings of success, because they don't have success on standardized tests. Plus you have better communication with parents--[sharing the portfolio at] the beginning, middle and end of the year gives the parent a much greater idea of the progress the student has made."

Southwest Region School District
Aleknagik North Shore School, Kathy Schubeck, Multigrade Teacher
(842-5681)

1. I've discovered that the way the DOE and the district level person describe your project are a little different. How would *you* describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your classroom?

The portfolio is a composite of all that the student has done that year: things they don't know and need to work on more, and very specific. It also has writing samples. Not polished, just a random writing sample. I can go through and see, and the next teacher has an idea of what the kids are capable of doing--grammar, fluency, booklists, what interests the kids, etc. Lot of writing word problems, so I would put them in there. I'm a real believer in the Math Their Way approach, so I'd put that in there.

We've begun these this year, the last half of the year. We only incorporate them K-4 at this point, and it's really early yet for us to see any changes or how it's going to affect the school. The changes I see at this point are in my thinking and the kids' reactions. It's made us focus more on saving particular works of the kids. In years past, every teacher says, "this is really good," but you don't know what to do with it--put it up, send it home--now this is a receptacle for those. It could get unwieldy, but it gives the teacher a way to focus in on work done by the student, and a place to record it. We keep a list of books the kids have read throughout the year. Having the books in there that the kids have read is good for parents.

As far as the classroom, it will probably mean we spend more time testing for understanding. Every objective will have its own question. Next year we will have hundreds of questions for each objective. The teacher can call up a random selection on the computer for a particular objective, and then if the student matches it, she can check it off. The computer will be a real aid. Todd Overby in Togiak is trying to find a way that teachers would be able to pull off of an item bank. (Take the fourth grade, third objective under math, call it up, random sample of questions, make up a test, the student takes in on the computer, etc.) Supposedly at the end of the year we will test what we have completed. We took some samples last year, and will again this year to see how they're going.

2. Why did you decide to try assessing in this way?

The teacher would pull portfolios off the shelf and see what groups of kids needed. Teachers wouldn't have to spend the first month of the year finding out what students know.

When I first heard of the idea of competency testing (because a portfolio is more than just competency testing, of course) it was that the teacher would have a list of all of the competencies a child should know, before and after leaving the class. Then the teacher would know she's not just an island, she's a puzzle piece. For a teacher in a small bush village, it's an oasis, a godsend. You can look at them and find one that matches up

and teach the whole group. And as the teacher teaches the competencies, [she would] pull up questions out of the item bank. Once she found the children could pass, [she would] test once a month to see if it was really learned. And then at the end of the year, give the test for that grade level as a final verification.

It's useful to the subsequent teacher. [Is it also useful to parents?] *One of the things it hopefully will do is get parents in. We're debating having parents sign off on them. They would have to come in once a year and have feedback, and hopefully they will have a better understanding of what it is that children are learning--not just talking about but also seeing. The verdict is still out as to how it's going to work with parents; our parents have been really positive about it.*

3. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

The two teachers who are using this have not really made it available to the children in its totality. I've been reluctant to do that because I didn't know how students who are not doing well would respond. I shared it with the top level kids--eighth graders in algebra. I've asked them what competencies they wanted to really work on. I was amazed at the results. They have gone off and found pages and done extra homework, calling me on the phone. Their seeing their own progress is so valuable, and it's so obvious I can't believe I didn't do it before. I think the main thing--competencies and portfolios both--is the objectives of what they are supposed to learn are clear in everyone's mind.

4. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"It's growing with me, it's evolving with me, and as it evolves, I'm finding ways to use it more effectively. The competencies cannot tell me what their writing level is. Writing is probably the main one. As I use it more, and become more comfortable with the competencies, I will become more comfortable with the competencies, I will become more comfortable with what I would like to include and what I would like another teacher to include for me.

"A couple [of] negatives: it is incredibly time consuming. It is a lot more work for the teacher; it is not less work. And I think for some teachers it is going to be very intimidated because of the whole concept of the conferences--parents coming in. I hope that teachers aren't going to fight it."

Juneau Douglas School District, Annie Calkins, Curriculum Director (789-4543)

1. Describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your project.

This is a first grade language arts portfolio project--reading and writing, and development work on listening and speaking. The parent gets to see the portfolio at parent conference. The basis is samples of student work, the observation sheets, xeroxed pages of what students are reading attached to the continuum, running records of miscue analysis, official writing samples, pre and post with all first graders. All of our first grade teachers are involved [Kathy Hanna, Bryn Nelson, Lori Meiners, Julie Norton, Auke Bay; Joyce Smith, Nina Massey, Linda Sorensen, Shirley Walkush, Gastineau; Patricia Funk, Patricia George, Nancy Hakari, Lori Marie Hoover, Gerrianne McLeod, Glacier Valley; Sarah Burns, Kathryn Eddy, Mary Claire Harris, Fred Hiltner, Mary Mygatt; Harborview; Karen Allen, Suzanne Cary, Beverly Miller, Mendenhall River].

We made major revisions last summer, incorporating self-reflection. Another issue districtwide is the relationship between the report card and the portfolio. Next year we will add listening and speaking. Next year the process will be computerized, with a Macintosh for every teacher involved, plus training for administrators in the district. We have endorsed the notion of a four to five year commitment to portfolios, moving up to second grade next year, and third the following, and so forth.

2. What content is being assessed in this fashion?

The component parts are reading attitudes, reading process and behaviors, writing (a sample, focused holistic scoring), writing conferences (attitudes about writing)--and the forms that go along with all of these. We are in development with listening and speaking. There are some big issues. Everybody in the district is doing this. It's an overwhelming amount of work, the narrative that you have to write, and so forth. We're asking, what is the best way to present the information about listening and speaking. The curriculum is expressive/receptive. Speech and language people have been helping us try to define the developmental skills in listening and speaking.

3. Did you set some standards in advance for levels of performance?

No. I get all of the portfolios, and then the five reading specialists and I will sit down and look across the district to see what we have. The reading process is the big one. Everyone loves the continuums we have so far (emergent, beginning, developing and independent readers) and these are used in parent conferences. It's made teachers really think about what is developmentally appropriate. The whole process shows that we have "developmentally appropriate" rhetoric, but we don't always know what it looks like in the classroom. Classroom management has also become an issue--what do I do with the rest of the class while I'm conferencing with students. One of the attitudes I hear is "I'm spending all of my time..." It's a revealing

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process. It has brought to the forefront where we really need to do quite a bit of work with people. It's made us develop definitions around the purpose of assessment--the reality of when you try to take a whole district staff and move them. What does it really mean to readjust your instruction, redo your classroom management, redo your evaluation? We spend a lot of time talking about charting children on the continuum. Parents seem to like it because there's so much more information than the report card.

4. How did you decide to assess this content in this fashion?

This was decided before I came. The purpose, as I understand it, was to have longitudinal individualized demonstration of growth and progress. There was a dissatisfaction with standardized measures, and a desire to be accountable.

5. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

The last thing to go in in the spring is the child reflecting on what he/she has learned about reading and writing this year. Their letters go into the portfolio. Teachers aren't sure they want to do this. There is disagreement about whether kids are developmentally ready to do this. One teacher has done this, and kids generated "good stuff." We will definitely have some self-reflective letters in some portfolios this year and in all next year.

6. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"I have a real concern for consistency across the district--standards. We really all need to get more understanding of what the 'emergent reader' is, for example, get into the nitty gritty content of the reading process, particularly."

Juneau Douglas School District
Auke Bay Elementary, Kathy Hanna, First Grade Teacher (789-7530)

1. I've discovered that the way the DOE and the district level person describe your project are a little different. How would *you* describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your classroom?

We try different things. This coming quarter we're doing the reading and writing continuum--writing will have a sample attached for this quarter, and the reading will have a xeroxed page of reading they're doing. The teacher can write a comment if he or she wants--comments are not mandatory on them. The parent gets a copy of both the continuums with comments, if you choose to make comments. It's used primarily for parent conferencing--all of the children's work. I use them to store any samples of children's work--to store math assessment--it's a good folder to put anything into. I weed them out at the end of the year so they are solely for language arts, then they go on to the second grade teacher.

2. Why did you decide to try assessing in this way?

The continuum is real descriptive. You put an 'X' where the child is. [see also question 4, below, which answers the same question.]

3. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

Yeah--they know that's where they put writing samples, and I do a running record of reading once a quarter, and they know when I do that. We interview each child and we talk about it. I put a copy of every piece of their computer writing in and I do the selecting. [Have you noticed an effect, positive or negative?] ***Yeah, especially when they have a chance to look at samples of their writing at the beginning of the year and samples now. It's obvious that they're really delighted with what they've learned. The little faces light up: wow, look what I can do now. [It includes] even samples of their reading, to show them what they could read at the beginning of the year and what they can read now.***

4. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

"I think it gives you a really good picture of how children learn. You can see progress through the year. It's a daily thing you do with kids. Not just a quarterly assessment like a report card. It's something you think about each time you work with a kid--the notetaking you do each time. It's a lot of things that teachers already do, just a little more formalized way of doing it."

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Anchorage School District
Susitna Elementary School (337-1583)
Meeting with Portfolio Committee--Laura Brown-Cochran (Intermediate Teacher), Carolyn Crosby (Kindergarten Teacher), Jan Flavel (Primary Teacher), Elsa Aegerter (Primary Teacher), Cindy Murati (Primary Teacher), Jeanne Nelson (Intermediate Teacher), Gale Johnson (Intermediate Teacher), Peggy Murphy (Intermediate Teacher) and Principal Sonja Hawkins--Tom Straugh, ASD Assessment and Evaluation (269-2133), and Sandra Guerrieri, Elementary Supervisor
(Note: All questions asked during this interview)

1. Describe the way in which you are using portfolio assessment in your project.

Susitna has been two years in the project. This is the first year assessing writing in this fashion. The grant money has provided time for teachers to get together and set out criteria for assessment.

We developed a portfolio system to report to parents and pass on to the next teacher--a permanent system. This year we decided we were missing an important component--the self-evaluation of the child, and involvement of the child. We decided to key on self-esteem. We also decided that as a staff we need to have a class to help people who were not far along in understanding or comfort with the portfolio process. Thirty-five people attended the class, many from our own staff.

We have someone doing portfolios at every grade level. We have a minimum expectation for the staff that everyone will collect three writing samples, one taken at the beginning of the year, one at the end, and one the student gets to choose. This must be original work, done at school, and edited only by the student. But there is also someone from every grade doing more than this. The Committee is made up of the most involved people. We elected to go further--student self-evaluation, math, and at some grades, across the curriculum. Student self-esteem was a big focus for us this year.

The Committee met four to five times this year. We did training with the rest of the staff, we experimented with conferencing, we conducted some inservice outside of the district, and we presented at the local chapter of Phi Delta Kappa.

There are really two levels of portfolios. The first we call the "working portfolio." It has all of the samples of what the student has done. Then at the end of the year that becomes the "permanent portfolio."

One concern is when to add other teachers on the staff who are not now participating. Different teachers have different levels of comfort with the concept. We will be phasing in other years and other grades. We are allowing the project here to evolve. People have to go through the process [of discovering what a portfolio is and can do]. They need to be able to start developmentally and move from that point--that's part of empowerment.

Another concern is if and when to replace report cards altogether. There are organizational/mechanical things to do, like deciding the interface of the portfolio with the report card.

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2. What content is being assessed in this fashion?

Writing for the whole staff, and selected other content areas for more involved staff members, most notably the Committee. [See also question 1]

3. Did you set standards in advance for levels of performance?

This district has been involved in the writing process for a long time. [Discussion frequently included mention of writing rubric, analytical scoring, holistic scoring.]

4. How did you decide to assess this particular content in this fashion?

The portfolio is much more encompassing than the cum folder. It could have the information in the cum folder added to it, however. Lots of accountability comes from this. We ask, "how can we show through the portfolio [what the student can do]." There are content areas it doesn't assess well. [Why writing?] ***Most teachers keep writing folders, so that lent itself to portfolios. There is a frustration with dealing with the report card and integrated or whole language. Grades with the portfolio are not something the teacher does to you; the portfolio promotes ownership.***

5. Are students aware that they are being assessed in a different way? If so, have you noticed any effect on them, positive or negative?

Some used child-generated portfolios--kids presented to their parents. We had lots of good parent feedback. They sent in notes of support, and asked intelligent questions. There was lots of ownership on the part of the student, and lots more parent involvement in the conference. Conference time was an opportunity for the child to share. One hundred percent of the parents showed up [one teacher reported]. There was a wide range of kid report: some felt good, some strange. It was more like a celebration. A child could not do this without a portfolio.

At the kindergarten level, it was a celebration with the student of such things as improvement in handwriting. The kindergarten kids had a choice. Three opted not to do it. After the first kids came back excited, one opted in. Child choice was a feature.

[A first grade teacher reports:] Had I not been listening to them explain I would not have known how much they had learned. All kids made a portfolio. At first they thought it was an animal they were going to feed! I asked them, "What do we do in a conference that would show your parent how you learn?" They really did just what they put in there, and it was really good. I wrote a "celebration letter" and put it in the portfolio, which set the tone. I handed out paper and asked the parent to send back a letter celebrating the conference. Some had to be reminded several times, but most wrote. One little girl's whole family wrote." It was a learning process for parents, as well. Grade one kids did a self-evaluation and set goals for themselves.

Everyone sees progress, including Resource kids. They are able to explain their own problems: "This is an area that I know I really need to

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work on." The things in the portfolio showed progress, and everyone makes it.

In the sixth grade, they made an action plan. Even before the report card they had a good understanding of how they were going to do. Plans were very specific: "Between now and May..." Cooperative learning groups monitored the action plans.

6. What comes out of portfolio-based assessment? What is the most important thing that you've learned that you would like to share with other educators?

Note: questions 5 and 6 should actually be combined, since the focus of the project this year, for committee members, was student involvement and student self-esteem.

Gale Johnson - ***"Using it during conferences has given me more confidence about grading a student. It has encouraged me, supporting my professionalism. It heightens professionalism."***

Jan Flavel - ***"Using portfolios has made the word 'assessment' valid for myself, parents and students. I think that after using these, I understand what this really is, and that it's ongoing."***

Carolyn Crosby - ***"I think all of us probably would echo that. [I feel best about] having kindergartners going out of kindergarten being excited about learning and their goals, with very good self-esteem...going into first grade turned on about themselves. One little boy wanted to fondle every piece of paper [at his conference]: 'and look how I did this!'"***

Cindy Murati - ***"I think that, being part of a group that [tries and discusses] different assessment rubrics, I have internalized that enough that I know what I am looking for. I don't have to go and look it up."***

Elsa Aegerter - ***"I think helping children learn to set goals and evaluate whether they meet those goals--set up a way of meeting those goals...the portfolio is a tool. Kindergartners don't choose a writing piece, but they celebrate at the third quarter conference. In 19 years of teaching, it's been my best year yet...a prized experience."***

Jeanne Nelson - ***"The portfolio, originally, was for showing to parents. But getting the students to the point of making the presentation was marvelous. We made them aware that we expected them to present. They prepared, practiced, they built an agenda. They made successful presentations, with visual aids, an agenda. They were proud of themselves. They prepared in groups of four. Students practiced, and critiqued in a positive way. Even now we see a changed vocabulary--the way they use words, the closeness of the group. These were teacher chosen groups, chosen at random. The students made a 15-20 minute presentation. The teacher was the facilitator."***

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Laura Brown-Cochran - *"Students had a post-conference with the group...'Were you nervous? What did you talk about?' We've seen a lot of ownership. The vocabulary changed from 'what you gave me,' to 'what I earned.'"*

Peggy Murphy - *"The kids were really able to see their progress. They were very specific in their goals. Rather than 'my writing,' they said 'I would like to be able to use paragraphs,' 'Do long division.' Very specific and very able to assess their goals from the quarter before. We have really learned from each other. It's crucial to have support from your principal."*

Sonja Hawkins - *"This really had all of the elements of a student-at-risk program. The kids were becoming more responsible for learning. There was a behavior change in the kids. They were beginning to realize that that's their learning...'it's their thing.'"*

Sandy Guerrieri - *"All year long Carol Comeau [Executive Director of Elementary Education] and I were excited about the kinds of things that they have been doing. You can feel the excitement. It's great to see the commitment, sharing, caring, growing. It's really powerful...to send that message to parents, 'let this kid share with you.'"*

Appendix C

Susitna Elementary School
Portfolio Committee Goals

GOALS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY:

1. Parent reporting

2. Teacher/child conferencing with the objective of developing child's self-evaluation skills

3. To use with other evaluation tools

4. Cross-curricular reporting

5. Follow a child from year to year to provide information and samples for subsequent teachers

6. And ultimately to replace the report card as an evaluation tool

PORTFOLIOS COULD CONTAIN:

1. Reading and writing rubrics (goals 1 & 2)

2. Writing samples (goals 1, 2 & 5)

3. A child selected writing piece (goals 1, 2 & 5)

4. Optional - audio tape of child reading (goals 2, 3, & 5)

5. Math Assessment (goals 1 & 2)

6. List of special topics and cross-curriculum units (goal 5)

Intermediate grade, student generated conference agenda...
[given to interviewer in student handwriting]

Agenda for ? Conference

I. Writing folder
- *A. Things I Can Write About*
- *B. Books I Have Read*

II. Analytical Writing Guide

III. Chosen Composition
- *A. Web/Outline*
- *B. First Writing*
- *C. Small Group Conference*
- *D. Second Writing*
- *E. Small Group Critiques*
- *F. Final Writing*
- *G. Self Reflection*

IV. All Other Subjects
- *A. Estimate Grades (Use 3-Ring Notebook)*
  - *1. Math*
  - *2. SS*
  - *3. Science*
  - *4. Reading*
  - *5. Spelling*

V. Fourth Quarter Action Plan for _____

VI. Report Card

Appendix D

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District Conversations Between Central Office Staff and Birch Elementary Project Teachers

[Anecdotal evidence collected by Marlys Henderson, 2/19/91, in conversation with Mary Ramsaur, Bonnie Wallace, Diane Hansen and Harriet Klann. Chris Williams, principal, and Jim Villano were also present.]

The four teachers listed above had 30 minute parent conferences at the end of the 2nd quarter. Previously the parent conferences were held only at the end of the 1st and 3rd quarter and were scheduled at 15 minute intervals. The conferences were held in "temporary offices," a partitioned cubicle in the hall.

Mary - There was overwhelming response by parents for 30 minute parent conferences, using the portfolio to show student growth and development. There was close to 100% parent participation.

The parent form needs to be changed as most parents just circled "yes" as to the usefulness and purpose of the portfolio; they did not write out any comments.

At our first conference at the end of the 1st nine weeks, we focused on the reading/writing stages, including invented spelling. Parents were shown the stages and we then highlighted for them the stages were their child was.

Diane - Parents liked to see the stages and wanted to see where the child was going.

At the second conference the focus was on providing parents with information about the analytical traits for writing. The Beaverton traits which we had rewritten for primary were too narrow in focus. We need to broaden the traits for parents, especially "voice" as it was too simplistic or too narrow. The parents liked the traits as it related to their life; they could see how it would help their writing as adults. They also liked it as a model for them to use in helping their child to improve writing.

We're training parents. The portfolio has to be done with parents. Handing it to them doesn't do it--the parents said. We need to have it put into perspective (not just a bunch of papers).

Jim - Was the purpose for your portfolio for parent information?

All - Yes.

Mary - We had offices for our parent conferences this time. We did not have them in our rooms. It gave us a feeling of being professional and it also was easier to stick faithfully to the time limits of 30 minutes.

We also are going to stick with the interview (individual reading conference to determine reading level). We call it "interviewing." But we still need more information on how to take notes when children are reading,. There never is enough time for one on one with a child in the interviewing reading conference.

Diane - Second grade parents are concerned with what's next. Will the portfolio go with the student to their new school. For kids moving mid-year I send a narrative and Mary sends: 1. an inventory where developmental stages are listed, 2. a readability level, taken from a reading experience using an old basal, and 3. the names of books read. We need to work on transfer forms. The forms could be in triplicate. One could be used as a conference tool for parent, one would be placed in the portfolio and one to be used for the permanent record.

The "child as emergent reader." We need to change the terms under the cueing systems such as semantic, graphphonemic, etc., as they are not terms readily understood outside of the educational community.

The reading/writing assessment bar graph that Mary developed last year was used during the January conference. In January we also introduced the social/emotional checklist. We filled it out for all students but only showed it to parents where there is a concern. We will do it once a year in January. At the end of the year we will do the summary sheet. We will go to a separate writing assessment (narrative) and do the same one three times.

Bonnie - I like the Reading Recording sheet taken from the Primary Language Record. I use it with the reading conference when I am working with kids.

As second grade teachers we still need to talk about the writing forms.

We are thinking of doing listening/speaking once a year in January.

Diane - For listening/speaking basically it is observational and talking with kids. This form needs to be really open and up to teacher discretion. I, as a teacher trained in speech/language, look at listening/speaking differently than Mary and Bonnie.

Bonnie - Concerning the January conferences--they were outstanding...First, I need more time than 30 minutes. There was lots of positive feedback. Still they could have had lots more. I am doing lots of instruction of parents. The social/emotional form was vital. I also had math in mine which was important as it presented a whole picture. (All of the participating teachers included math). All of the parents asked, "What happens now? Where do the portfolios go from here? Why isn't Badger doing it?" (Most of their students go to Badger). The second time around (for portfolio conferences) the parents are so much more comfortable. I had 100% parent participation. It opened up doors for parents. They asked, "Why didn't I have this when I was a kid?" and "Now I know what to do with my child."

Diane - Parents don't even look at the report card. They forget to sign it.

Bonnie - We talked about listening/speaking at the conferences. The parents didn't previously understand why their child could not accomplish certain tasks. Now this assessment makes it clear to them. What I did was to give a four-part instruction to my students for listening skills. "Walk down the hall, turn around, walk back, etc." Some children could only follow a couple of directions. For speaking I had them "share" and wrote down what they were saying during the share time. This all brought home to parents the problems, and parents said, "No wonder they can't do this at home." The invented spelling became real when they saw the spelling test (Robin Lindsley's test) that we gave. They began to trust us.

We also included the Special Ed 024 form which lists goals and objectives for IEP.

We did not include page 1-3 or signature pages or test results. But we did include specialists reports and math.

The writing process made more sense to parents when they saw the brainstorming and the drafts.

They were fascinated with the journals.

The interest inventory was most successful and I drug my feet on that one. (Bonnie designed the interest inventory, which included questions such as: What do you like to read? What do you like to do at school? and What do you want to tell me about?)

Harriet - All parents were positive for the portfolio. To try to explain the writing process to parents in my room was overwhelming to them. All the labels of the writing process should be taught during a PTA meeting, perhaps.

Diane - Yes, we have to watch how much information is given at one time. But the next time, it becomes more familiar and when we conference the third time, will be even easier.

We need dollars to do this. We want to go for three years and be exempted from the report card.

Bonnie is the control group for this project. She is taking the original portfolio all the way through. She is not revising the original design over the two-year period. She is sticking with the original intended idea and is only adding a little bit. First grade is revamping continually.

Jim - Would this be idiosyncratic to each teacher?

Diane - We do need uniform data collection such as: developmental spelling lists, journal writing and writing sample. It would need to be broken down by grade level, but uniform enough to transfer teacher to teacher. We are all roughly doing the same tying, but different styles. Yet we are coming out with the same thing.

Mary - I am still streamlining as it is still overwhelming. Bonnie has IEP training.

Jim - Should there be an IEP for each kid?

Harriet - Parents liked to see the growth and development. We talk developmental, but parents are conditioned to grade levels. Is a hard concept to put across. Is overwhelming for me and the parents.

Bonnie - Portfolio is null and void if don't believe in developmentally appropriate practices.

Mary - I think it is cheaper to train for portfolio even with the professional leave time for developing it and for the extra parent conference than for the ITBS

[suggestions given at this point to Central Office staff: 1. Look into colored paper, different for each content reported, for next year; 2. Change the portfolio cover to include math; 3. Get together 1/2 day in May to prepare for the fall; 4. April 19 we would like to meet as a building for our own in-service to work on portfolios.)

Jim - Diane, why are you doing this? You came into first grade this year and had not

previously worked on the portfolio.

Diane - I was upset first quarter, but I went to my own child's first grade conference. I spoke with the teacher for 10 minutes and she put a file folder in front of me. That was it! Now, I wouldn't drop doing this. Teachers districtwide would have to agree with the philosophy and there is also a commitment of time. What works for this school, might not work for another school. Portfolios can be sold if there is ownership involved.

Bonnie - It isn't a monumental horror. It helps us as educators to evaluate. There is pride here in what we have done. At first it was overwhelming and we walked gingerly, but there is pride as you progress.

Diane - At first I tried to do what Mary Carolyn was doing, but I couldn't (because it was her). However, I needed her model to adapt.

Bonnie - Next year our confidence will be so much greater. Our enthusiasm will be apparent.

Mary - That's what is carrying us now--our enthusiasm.

Diane - Parents said, "You really know my child."

Bonnie - I'm humbled because parents said, "It is so simple. Why hasn't this always been this way for my other children?"

Mary - It's portfolio with training--not just portfolio. Parents need background, too. Thirty minute parent conferences three times a year is fantastic.

Diane - If we could have it the same way next year, it would be wonderful.

Bonnie - Our offices--our stalls--were "bizarre." It made us seem so professional; we should put up our credentials on the "office" walls and request a phone! The "office" kept us incredibly focused. Parents weren't looking about for a lost lunch pail or looking at the room decorations, but were focused with the portfolio and us. It was a very warm feeling and very nurturing, also. It was close quarters, but we shared a camaraderie with the parents.

The portfolio/conference made us better at what we do. It is apparent that we are not interviewing enough (meeting with individual students in reading conferences to determine reading strengths/weaknesses).

All - Chris, our principal, set up a community center where parents could meet one another and wait for their conference. There was coffee available and flowers decorated the table.

Chris - We would like to continue doing this. However, we do need financial support for next year. Could DOE and the school district, together, afford to give us 10-12 days of professional leave to continue this project/ It would require six days from the state and six days from the district.

During our inservice today, I met with parents and we are developing a pamphlet

about portfolios. The advisory committee parents are so excited about the portfolios. However, they do want more information before the conference. This pamphlet would help. Not only would terms such as "developmental stages," "assessment and evaluation" and "journals" be defined, but portfolios would be explained.

Mary - The hardest thing is to keep coming up with models. We pull from sources from what we know. We need something to look at--a greater bank of models to choose from --more primary literature.

Bonnie - Our "jargon" needs to be correct. Not too wordy. The terminology needs to be useful. The more simple I got with terms the more useful and more easily it flowed.

Chris - What we want is a video on conferences with parents, to be taped for staff development.

Bonnie - Individually we get fragmented. Together is better. As team we reinforce one another--one picks up where the other is stressed.

Chris - We get three times the amount of support from parents. We have established a communication pattern and we see parents more willing to support the schools.

Appendix E

Fairbanks North Star Borough School District
Conversations Between Central Office Staff and
Lathrop High School Project Teachers

[Anecdotal information gathered in conversation between Jim Villano, Marlys Henderson and Lathrop teachers Chuck Prejean, BJ Craig, and Kathy Alton, 12/17/90. Individual speakers not identified.]

Let's keep the creative piece in.

Add another piece--an opinion paper.

Staple drafts together.

Put the assessment form on the portfolio cover.

Send out a parent survey.

Before responding to a particular piece of literature, the raters should have the opportunity to read it ahead of time, or, at least, a plot summary should be looked at during the preliminary activities.

Should there be a maximum length? It is taking a long time to read some of the research papers, etc., that students submitted in their portfolios, as "author's choice."

Should we keep the portfolios accessible for next year? We could use them next year to see what the student was weak in.

Should they be available for parent perusal for conference or sent home?

We're getting valuable information for this, but time is needed.

A clerk is needed. We are not willing to do it, unless some relief is given from clerical tasks.

A fundamental change in restructuring schools is needed.

Survival is the vision. A vision cannot come about because of need to survive--poor work notices. Numbers of students, flow charts, grades, grades, grades all of the time.

Can't change without time, time, time, and money.

Who will organize it?

Here is more evidence for interdisciplinary studies, because portfolios for every subject might be overwhelming.

Portfolios make one think of oneself and of other audiences.

Makes students become organized.

Show and motivation - initiative

Shows student as author--from prewrite to final write. Shows the development of a piece of writing.

Shows growth and change from preliminary to final assessment. Shows reasons for failure and shows strengths/weaknesses.

Should there be a place for student comments on assessment sheet after the preliminary assessment? We could attach 1/2 sheet stapled on for students.

[Anecdotal information gathered in conversation between Jim Villano, Marlys Henderson and Lathrop teachers BJ Craig and Kathy Alton, 4/1/91. Individual speakers not identified.]

1. Creative piece--the rubric works for poetry, but somehow it doesn't work as effectively for a descriptive piece or narrative piece. Sentence structure and conventions do seem important even in creative pieces, other than poetry. Should the poetry rubric include the poetic devices? Just a thought.

2. Persuasion--should we use a primary trait rubric--specific to opinion (persuasiveness)?

3. Another point to ponder. Some students submitted 2-4 poems. It was difficult to do an assessment, since oftentimes two of the poems were excellent and another was not. Could students submit a certain number of lines, for example 10, instead of several poems?

4. Should students attach the piece of literature that they respond to? Or if an entire class responds to the same piece of literature, could that be sent to the readers ahead of time?

5. Plot summaries. It is hard to find voice or ideas that rate a 5.

6. Why portfolios for secondary if teachers have already read the papers and graded them?
Another audience. "Is metacognition (self-evaluation) and important aspect? (Marlys) Students don't seem to mind--200 points of credit. Communicating with other teachers about student writing and the qualities of good writing. "Departmental standards?" (Jim) We felt that there was great evidence to show that the students in AP Comp who has done this last semester were much more introspective about their writing and much more sophisticated in writing about it in their cover letter (self-evaluation). BJ said the process was easier because of the continuity. What happens to the portfolios at the end of this year/semester? Keep or send home with students. BJ said her students want them.

STUDENT RESPONSE TO PORTFOLIOS (questions asked)

Do you think the three choices adequately represent you?
If different writing choices, what should they be?
Do you think the PASS/FAIL should be kept?
Should the portfolio be graded?
Did this make you think about yourself as a writer?
Would your parents be willing to assess portfolio writings?
Should your parents assess?
Do you like the idea of having readers other than teachers assess?

Appendix F

Juneau School District
First Grade Teacher Survey
April, 1991

Total surveys tallied: 23

We're continually interested in your response to your involvement with the First Grade Portfolio process. Please take a few minutes and give your honest opinions by fast-writing to each of the questions below:

1. What have been the most valuable parts of the process for you this year, in terms of what you've learned about students, about language arts, and about yourself as a teacher?
See attached summary

2. What specific problems or issues do you have with the process at this time (what are the difficulties for you)?
See attached summary

3. What specifically do you need to know more about when you think about the portfolio process (running records, classroom management, recordkeeping, computerizing evaluations, etc.)?
See attached summary

4. Please rank yourself on these scales:

A. I feel that I understand the portfolio process

1	2	3	4	5
Very Well		Adequately		Vaguely
8	**7**	**6**	**2**	**0**

B. I think doing portfolios is worth the time spent

1	2	3	4	5
Wholeheartedly agree		Unsure at this time		Definitely Disagree
9	**9**	**4**	**1**	**0**

C. How do you evaluate your own learning?

1	2	3	4	5
I've learned an enormous amount				I've learned very little that's new
10	**9**	**3**	**1**	**0**

D. How helpful was your building Reading Specialist to you throughout the portfolio process?

1	2	3	4	5
Extremely helpful				Not helpful at all really
13	**7**	**1**	**0**	**0**

SUMMARY OF JUNEAU TEACHER COMMENTS

- It certainly lends itself to analyzing each students' strengths and weaknesses in depth. It's ongoing and process oriented. You learn by doing it.
- I've found that the writing survey along with their samples have been the most valuable. The portfolio and all our discussions on it have caused me a great deal of introspection and re-evaluation of my feelings and thoughts on teaching reading and writing.
- Has helped to focus instruction on strategies rather than skills. Still need the skills when applying the strategies--though skills are useless in and of themselves
- Students are progressing despite my doubts at times. Language arts truly is an integrated, tied together process (reading, writing, spelling). I've enjoyed dealing with each student individually.
- It has been a tremendous year! As a teacher I became much more observant and aware of the process of learning. By learning I am not only speaking of the process students go through but also the process we as adult learners go through.
- Involving the children in our room in the process allowing them an opportunity to discuss their gains and areas of improvement.

1. *What have been the most valuable parts of the process for you this year, in terms of what you've learned about students, about language arts, and about yourself as a teacher?*

- Evaluating writing and reading as a developmental process has helped support that teaching focus, that of a sequential early childhood model.
- Writing samples and developmental skills continuum for reading
- Students--progression of progress; specifics of continuum. Language Arts--interrelations of program; fitting it all together in a meaningful whole. Teacher --time management for observation and assessment of strengths, weaknesses, "flowability," and changes.
- The language used in the writing and reading continuums.
- The process of observing children and their learning has been incredible--most valuable! Language arts, ongoing learning, myself frazzled, but it's been worth it!
- Continuum was a good thing. Will keep that. Reading Inventory parents liked. Didn't tell me anything but can be used with parents. Writing prompt good.
- The continual refinement of portfolio forms and the writing assessment were valuable. Attitude surveys were helpful to my students, parents, and myself.
- I really learned a lot from the scoring of the students' writing. I also found helping to develop and then actually writing the Reading summary Sheets made me really diagnose students' reading strategies.
- Helping facilitate the second grade group in portfolios has given me lots more time than in the past in second grade classrooms and I've learned a lot about working with grade two.
- The writing assessment was more worthwhile than I had anticipated at the beginning of the year. There was growth.
- I've learned to focus on certain areas with children, i.e., different focuses for each child.
- I feel I am getting better at observing kids and their growth
- I've become aware of many new terms, strategies, techniques, but have mastered

none of them. The writing assessment was the most valuable (organized for me).

- I feel it's been wonderful to see how much children have grown during the year!
- I appreciated the continuum lines with characteristics under them--helpful to both parents and teachers. I learned portfolios take a lot of time to do well!

2. *What specific problems or issues do you have with the process at this time (what are the difficulties for you)?*

TIME:

- Time--there is still a substantial quantity of time that's involved in putting together a meaningful, coherent portfolio. I don't object to taking the time--I do, however, object to taking so much time. I still see/feel the need for a more standardized component--less subjective
- Time! True assessments really take a lot of time from teaching/classroom management. Fortunately, I was somewhat successful at organizing my class to make the portfolio assessment somewhat possible.
- Time away from teaching spent on evaluation and teacher time required to write out evaluation summaries (Why can't we mark the continuum?).
- Time is the major crunch for the portfolio process.
- Time commitment is getting better. I think that we were trying to do too much at once. Became overwhelming. I also feel we were trying to be taught how to teach reading over again.
- Time involved--but the continuum helped a great deal. I would hope the continuum would be the one form used next year.
- The portfolios as they exist do still take a lot of class time and personal time to do. The computer programs that Bob Montag has put together are good and could be very useful. The reading continuums are more beneficial than the writing summaries to me as a teacher and to the parents.
- Allowing myself enough time to discuss the process with the people who need it the most--the children!

CONSISTENCY/STANDARDIZATION:

- Management and consistency across the District. Specifically what is required; to whom do you write--the next teacher, parent, child?
- There is a lot of variation in the way teachers use them. The second grade teachers might be confused by this when they receive the portfolios.
- I am bothered by everyone doing their own thing--no continuity across the District
- Districtwide testing should be early or mid-September and late April or early May to see maximum growth.

WRITING ASSESSMENT:

- I would like the writing continuum to match the writing sample continuum.
- The two writing prompts I didn't feel gave an accurate assessment of where my kids were at writing. I detested giving it.
- The writing analysis--it seems the questions on the writing assessment are "flat" (or maybe it's the response I get from the kids). Time is an issue (but it always is).

OBSERVATION:

- Being able to pinpoint exactly where each student is.

MANAGEMENT:

- I am the reading specialist in the building. I would like to see us continue to offer management ideas to help make the process easier for the teachers.
- The lack of decision to move up (or not) with other grades--slowness of the process as each grade tries portfolio.

REPORTING:

- For me it is reporting to parents in a language they can understand--reporting to teachers so that they can use the information and reporting to administrators so they will make valid assumptions about process learning.
- Trying to make the portfolio meet needs for reporting to the parents and at the same time be used as assessment reports for the District. Trying to balance technical reporting with ways to interpret for the parents, or report so parents will understand.
- Too much wordiness in the portfolio. Some of it I feel is not appropriate for first grade (student letter).
- Too much teacher jargon. I don't teach and assess in a way that I am sure how to say (on these forms) exactly where either child is--not clear enough on terms, procedures.
- The difficulty I have with this process is that I feel we wasted a great deal of time and effort earlier in the year doing things that were not for anyone and that no one would read.

Appendix G

Juneau School District
Spring Parent Survey

Total surveys tallied: 147

We're interested in your ideas and opinions about the language arts portfolio evaluation we're using with all first graders this year. Please take a minute to respond to these questions.

1. Did you feel the reading and writing portfolio information you received from the first grade teacher and your discussion of the portfolio about your child was:

125	Just right	*One parent was totally unaware of the portfolio
15	Too little	
3	Too much	

2. Do you feel that the portfolio gives you a clear evaluation of your child's reading and writing process?

Yes	No
112	34

3. In regard to a reading and writing assessment, which did you find more helpful, the report card or the portfolio?

Report Card	Portfolio	Both	Neither
17	94	31	4 (prefer discussions with teachers)

4. How was the "Attitude Survey" helpful in letting you know how your child feels about reading? Did you learn anything new?

See attached summary

5. Is the usual 20 minute conference time adequate to discuss all aspects of your child's learning, with the addition of the portfolio information? What is your idea of the "ideal conference"?

6. Other thoughts/comments?

Please return this survey in the enclosed envelope
Thank you for your time!

Summary of Juneau Parent Comments
April, 1991

"How was the 'Attitude Survey' helpful in letting you know how your child feels about reading? Did you learn anything new?

YES	NO	DIDN'T LEARN ANYTHING NEW	WHAT ATTITUDE SURVEY
10	18	16	24

- Her survey was perhaps more candid than I thought she would answer--it was a wonderful sample of her "voice."
- It was great! Helped me see how my child feels about himself and his ability to read. Very informative. His opinion of himself opened my eyes.
- It told us how interested our child was in learning to read and how he was progressing. Our first grade student has always been interested in learning to read "like his older brothers."
- It served to confirm what we already knew about his attitudes toward reading which were positive.
- I know--I talk to my child.
- I learned he likes it more than we thought and that really showed this past quarter as his reading visibly improved dramatically (because of his interest)
- I think the survey was great. In our case, I didn't learn anything new--I keep myself very involved with my first grader's academic progress.
- It helped me know where he was along with others in his age group.
- Yes, it was very helpful. I was a little surprised that my daughter felt a little bored when stories are read to her and she would much rather write.
- Good to know the teacher's perception of child's attitude. See if it meshes with the parent's.
- First time she was shy and didn't say much.
- Interesting to have the child's perspective--it's a good idea.
- I'd like a copy to take home with the report card.
- The survey was interesting, especially looking at differences in survey responses from the beginning of school and in March. The survey responses probably reflected what the child thought the teacher wanted to hear, so while it was interesting, usefulness is questionable.
- It was interesting.
- My child has always loved reading. But what was interesting was that her comments went from one word to several sentences.
- The best indicator of a child's interest in reading is his/her enthusiasm for reading at home. However, the survey does give some insight.
- Very interesting to "hear" in his own words how he feels.
- I read to my son every day and he reads to me and I felt I already knew where he was at in reading. He didn't test as well at school.
- Provided good insight.
- Any communication of child's progress is helpful.
- Yes, it is helpful...it was helpful to confirm my thoughts as to her progress.
- I think the reading teacher listens not only with her ears, but with her heart and eyes also--she's seeing a lot in these kids.
- It helped me to understand her progress. I learned how to help my child to read

without added pressure.

- I thought it was helpful to have some insight on how my daughter viewed herself and reading. Some of her thoughts surprised me--pleasantly so.
- I already knew my daughter's attitude about reading, but I did enjoy seeing her reactions to the questions about reading.
- No. ! spend a lot of time in my child's classroom and am up to date on her progress.
- The attitude survey informed me as to how she attacks reading.
- Reinforced child's expressing of love for reading. Impressed with child's choice of vocabulary to express good feelings about reading.
- Somewhat--I appreciated the information distributed on reading and the importance of it.
- It gave me a clearer idea. I liked it.
- Because it lets me see where he started and where he's at now.
- Yes, my child is more enthused about learning to read than I thought.
- It confirmed what I was getting at home.
- It helped me understand how my child really felt about reading. Yes, I learned she lacks confidence in herself when in fact she does pretty well.
- It was interesting to see how she felt and probably more true than what she may say to us if we ask those questions.
- Get back to the basics, stress reading, writing, and math, to the point of rote learning. Give teachers the authority to discipline the children in their classes. Assign homework, test weekly, and let the student know there is a price to pay for poor or incomplete work.
- Very helpful--more specific information.
- It was good
  Not a lot of new information, but it was good to have a second opinion.
- It helped me to understand how she feels about reading.
- It gave us our child's view.
- This was a waste of time and effort at least as it was conducted in my daughter's class. Nothing new was learned--kids may be too young to have "attitudes" about their reading and writing.
- Interesting
- O.K., but not worth the teacher's time.
- I think it was very good and helpful.
- It let me know how very important reading is to my child. He likes to read independently and he still enjoys being read to.
- It reinforced that we are doing some good things with our child--mainly reading to him.
- The attitude survey was very beneficial informing how my child feels.
- The reading survey was great. I did not realize how much she enjoys reading and how much confidence she has in herself.
- It let us know what level of reading she was at--very informative
- always good to hear what your child has to say to another person. I learned a few things.
- Not very helpful because the answers had to be dragged out of the kids. They were not spontaneous
- Yes, it was <u>excellent</u> to see changes and how he feels when speaking with his teacher (different from my view).
- I conducted some of these interviews. There are too many similar questions; most, if

not all, are at a loss for answers and repeat their responses. The puppy dog one seemed to work just as well and kids can do it themselves.

- We know she likes to read. We did not learn anything new except that reading in front of a group is "embarrassing."
- Gives parents the feeling of being part of the educational process.
- I learned how far he has come along.
- I really enjoyed reading the attitude survey and what my child said about reading.
- I was glad to see the classroom teacher become just as aware of my child's attitude as I was. I know the teacher is better able to teach my child knowing this information.
- Many of the questions seemed to be repetitious. Are all kids going to be 100% honest? The teacher observing the child's comments, actions and behavior throughout the whole year is going to reveal his/her attitude.

Seventeen of the surveys returned left this question completely blank.